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The Trinity Review
Spring, 1970



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In Memoriam, Loring Bailey '67

Business as usual. What else can anyone expect. It is all but impossible to remember that in that unforgivable mire in some bizarre place called Vietnam, a war continues, and that this war, like all wars, claims lives, mechanically, continually.

Last Sunday evening Loring Bailey, class of '67, was killed when an anti-personnel device was detonated. He was at what is called a night defensive position. Loring was a writer of uncanny insight, who certainly would have seen the irony of a "night defensive position" (are not all our positions in the night defensive?), and who would have truthfully asked what one expects of anti-personnel devices except that they will eliminate "personnel". The unspeakable horror is this dominance of irony, the lack of tragedy.

It was as a writer of magical, Fitzgerald-like stories that I knew Loring. He was a tall, dark-haired fellow, who had a somewhat mannered way of speaking, and who had a casual, affected way of holding his cigarette. His talk, even when he was heavily depressed, which was often, was witty, wicked and unutterably ironic. He was entranced by beautiful women, fast cars, (if they were beautiful) and fine liqueur (if it was strong). Behind his facade of the arrogant diletante was a reticent, very talented artist. His love of cars, their grace, power and speed, and the "beautiful people" that drove them, was real but he was never deceived by his own devotion. His stories, which were always full of those beautiful machines, were finally elegant diatribes against them and the mechanistic decadence that they have wrought. The stories were true because both the love and the hate of the author was true. The stories and their writer were quixotic anachronisms in a day and age when such anachronisms are barely tolerated. We will now never have the chance to know the fullness of what was apparently a considerable talent.

Loring leaves behind his wife, Maras, and his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Loring M. Bailey Sr. of Stonington, Connecticut.

—Jay Bernstein
March 20, 1970

The Trinity Review

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*The cover is a photograph by Richard T. Markovitz.
On the inside back cover is Minsky's, an etching by Mitchel Pappas.*

As this issue of the Trinity Review goes to press, the war in Vietnam continues. Each day the brutality of this war grows to proportions that make it almost impossible to calmly express a note of protest at the front of a literary magazine. However, the editors wish to take this opportunity to express their unqualified disgust with President Nixon's handling of the war. Our President's enchantment with his own political charm must cease and somewhere behind that leering facade of undaunted happiness must begin the realization that he is sending thousands of men to their deaths for the most senseless reasons ever offered in the history of warfare. This war must end now.

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Repairs

It was the simplest and most obvious thing to do: to sit down and wait. Eventually someone would realize that we were not where we were supposed to be and someone would come looking for us or someone who had been by would say where we were. Sitting and waiting would have been a most definite sort of action. They would perhaps have come looking for us in an airplane; it was not that long ago. They would send a big truck up and haul us off. The car was off the left side of the road, resting on its bottom with two good tires hanging in a gully; the truck would hoist the car by the front and drag it so that its belly scrubbed and the good front tire tore off, ragged, to duplicate the right ones.

It is difficult to tell about Lurio. This instance is the most relevant thing that I can think of. The matter is complete in my journal and I can cover the places where the journal seems hazy. I do not hold the journal to be gospel on this, because the journal has a particular slant on the whole thing. As I go over the journal I cannot help but be a bit ashamed for myself for having written with a slant, and that will have to explain the editorial slant that goes with my corrections and amplifications. Of course, the whole thing is a good seven years ago and Lurio has not been here to stand up for himself, to make a continuing and correcting picture in my mind as I have changed. I have to accept the journal's picture of Lurio and correct it according to the development of my own vision. I cannot do it very well; Lucien Lurio was a big force on me then.

When we were run off the road in the car I did think of sitting and waiting; I crawled out of the car and sat down in the road and took off my helmet. My nose was cut and felt broken in a mild way, which, in fact, it was; I ran my fingers down my nose and wiggled it. Lurio figured that I had hit my head, which I had, and that I was more dazed than I actually was. I thought that it was pretty natural to sit down in the road and Lurio tried to pick me up by the arms from behind and I got up by myself, I know.

There is a part in my journal — I wrote it the next day because I slept and was sick the rest of that day — about going off the road there, just beginning to descend to Barcelona. It is all in my journal because I thought that I would write memoirs, all narrative style, overly technical, full of words that I cannot remember ever knowing and expressing feelings that I regret. It must have taken a good three hours to write it all down; I remember writing in the hotel room and in the airport lobby. People came in all that day to see me and I said the story and wrote it down.

The journal is extensive. I thought that my responses were particular and interesting. I thought that I ran with a universally admired bunch of people, whose actions only I, as an understanding insider, could narrate interpretively. I wrote in all the cafes and the cars and the parties, anecdotes about all the insignificant people, several long conversations with Lurio. I have a long section written on the previous day; everyone that I knew was in Barcelona.

I will read from the journal about going off the road in the mountains. We turned off hard roads and went up gravel ones in the hills:

The car was throwing up yellow dust; it was around the side windows and probably in a billow behind. I did not look back. The road was poor; the gravel was corrugated and the turns which climbed the gradual final hill were fully lacking in favorable banking because of

the drainage. The tar remnants on the shoulders had been undercut and had fallen away on the outsides of the turns. Sometimes the car would slide and the wheels jump and the dust puff. Cobert was ahead of us, maybe gaining.

"Tight, to the left," I would say, reading the road notes. Lucien dragged his cigarette down the short straight and white-knuckled through the left-hander. "Broad, right, descent," drag, puff and an eddy through the wide turn, then the major exhalation of smoke.

There was no dust in the air ahead, maybe over the notch in the hill more of the road would show; the contour that we rose on undulated to a peak. The road was tightly curved back and forth on itself as if to give oxen a gradual rise to drag, perhaps laden donkeys. There was little chance of seeing ahead, estimating catching up the minute delay of starting; making a minute, passing, gaining a minute; the road going back to hard surface and finally putting a lead on Cobert in the Alfa coupe. The engine coughed. I switched the gasoline tanks and, as I did so, I heard the first of a car behind us.

I turned my head back; I was used to turning the valves, mechanically in the right order. It was a ripping noise, heavy canvas ripping. The road went right; I missed the notes. The red in the back window went left, wide left; I turned my head full-circle. The red passed as the radius opened. The dust spun back, yellow, gritty. The red car was Rischetti, maybe five starts back.

"Five, maybe ten minutes made up," I huddled involuntarily in the blind wash of dust. I began to read the notes furiously and the red ahead began to pull away. In a minute or thirty seconds we were out of the dust. "Right, sharp," then "left, sharp;" the dust eased and a duplicate of Rischetti's noise came from behind.

The same sound again indicated a team-mate of Rischetti: another Maserati: Seligardi. The two Maseratis had come up past the Mercedes and were now passing us. As the notch in the hill came down toward us the noise grew from behind. The red car and ours crested the hill together; my eyes were straight ahead on the road; my notes were flat in my lap. The road gradient reversed and the road went right in a sweeping turn which altogether lacked super-elevation. We were on the left, on the low side of the road; Lurio's hands jerked without real control right and left, right and the cars touched. My head bounced off the dashboard and, with my eyes empty, I felt only the pebbles of the gravel shoulder grinding against the floor beneath my seat.

The fact of the matter was that we were off the road, way up in the hills. If you are interested in the ethics of the man, the journal will be of little value. I come to a greater recognition of its lacking. The journal does not answer truthfully because I have changed in the intervening years; I wrote very much what I thought would be wished to be read then and, now, I am little concerned with the ethical considerations. Perhaps the truth does not matter; then I was concerned with lying, now I am not concerned with truth. The ethics in that consideration are things of a world apart. Whether Lurio tried to bump Seligardi matters very little and it mattered less because Rischetti, the other Maserati, was minutes ahead. I have no enthusiasm for it now and the coupe Mercedes was no match for the Maserati 300S.

What if Lurio had tried to bump Seligardi off the road? I do not recall because I hit my head on the dashboard. The Garrera Pan-Iberia was not a race on the record. Fifteen hundred kilometers around Spain, down the coast from Barcelona, then back and up over the mountains; it was a race, but not on the record. Lurio had nothing against Seligardi personally, I can assure you. I do not think that the bumping of the cars means much, no

matter how it is interpreted. We went off the road, half-way into a gully and we were stuck there.

The rest is in the journal; I did not mention sitting in the road and Lurio trying to pick me up. I said that we got out of the car and tried to think of a way to get back in the race; that was a natural response according to my feelings then. Those feelings were Lurio's. Instead of sitting and waiting we tried to get the car off its belly and back on the road. The journal says:

I took out the tool set and then let myself slide down into the gully ahead of the car and Lurio went across the road and collected an armload of sticks and scrub branches that he broke off.

I put my head against the bottom of the car, I know, because I went dizzy; the bottom of the car was a haze of spilled gasoline.

I bound up the oil cooler with metal tape and opened the exhaust pipe; it was flattened ahead of the point where the tail-pipe was torn off.

Lurio threw his sticks into the gully and climbed down and packed turfs around the overhanging tires. He reinforced his buttresses of turf with the sticks and made a ramp for the tires with them.

I was supposed to be the mechanic and Lurio asked me if the car would go.

"Not very far," I said, "just out of the gully, across the road, maybe beyond this curve." The engine would starve for oil and pack-up because it had lost most of its oil through the broken cooler; the oil pump lines were now severed and tied off.

I slid out from under the car to the bottom of the gully. Both Lurio and I climbed out from the gully behind the car; I remained standing while Lurio moved the helmets from his seat to mine and climbed into the car.

"It will start?"

"It ought to."

I did not write it in, but when I hit my head on the dashboard I had bumped the switch for the driving lights, turning them on and breaking the switch handle off. I left that out of the journal. Once the car was out of the ditch I tore the wires out of the back of the switch. I was ashamed of having left the lights to burn that long.

Lurio threw the clutch, turned the key and pushed the starter button. The car started and remounted the road with its right side dragging, grinding and making a flapping noise. The gasoline pump was spilling gasoline into the engine compartment and the gasoline was running out into the gravel in a broad dark streak parallel to the snaking creases that the car made in the soft road.

Lurio drove with his door open; on the Mercedes coupes the door opened up from a hinge in the roof of the car. The progress of the car ended when the car was across the road and twenty-five feet farther on.

The car starved for gas, I know. It started and ran on the gasoline in the lines and what was left in the injector pump reservoir. I doubt that Lurio would have gone much farther on, even if the engine had kept up.

What does this tell about Lurio? The interest is Lurio, the ethic of the man. This is only that he drove with his door open and that he drove the car out of the ditch. He got twenty-five feet farther on and his race ended. Lurio thought that the twenty-five feet advance was progress in his race; he was still competing and I was too; I think that I can say that frankly.

The journal says:

"Fix the gas," said Lurio. "The gas is spilling and I have no oil pressure."

"I can fix the gasoline; your oil pressure is gone."

"How far can we go without oil?"

"A mile more, maybe two. But you won't get anywhere without two new wheels and tires." As I said it, the left rear tire collapsed and the car was left with only one corner supported. There was one spare in the trunk.

"Fix the gas," said Lurio, implying that he would replace the tire.

I opened the hood of the car and bent into the gasoline fumes which rose like heat ripples in the air. The whole framing of the car was bent and most of the engine compartment appliances had been slightly relocated. The radiator pipes spilled the last of their water onto the engine; most of the water had vaporized away from the hole which the fan had torn in the radiator core. Lurio bounced the tire out of the trunk and came to take the jack from the firewall. He asked me if I could work the engine.

"Oh, yes," I said and put an adjustable wrench on the Bendix pump which still ran gasoline. "Put the gasoline lines back over to the empty tank." Lurio opened the passenger door and cut back the valves that I normally worked. The gasoline flow stopped with a long dribble and I started to piece together the hoses.

The car rose on Lurio's jack and I twisted the kinked hoses and crimped their clips back into place. I tore out the starter pump and salvaged its hoses; the pump itself I dropped into the oil and gasoline and water which ran together in the engine compartment pan.

Lurio changed the tire and when he came up to the engine compartment I told him that the car would go a bit farther and then the engine would seize. He went back to my seat, because he was on my side of the car, and cut over the partially full fuel tank into line with the pump; he had dropped the jack in the road and I thought that he was about to start off on the allowance of distance that I had given him. I pulled the fan belt away from its drive pulley; it had parted when the fan had stalled in the radiator.

Lurio walked around to the right side of the car where I was bent over the fender. "Going to push on or wait?" I straightened up. "I've done as much as I can."

"Wait," said Lurio.

"I've fixed the damn car for you and now you're going to sit it out."

"Wait for tires," said Lurio.

"They won't bring you tires."

"Manwaring will come and Groder will come."

"And you'll flag them and they'll give you their spares?"

"Yes, I suppose," Lurio supposed that Manwaring would turn over his car to him. Manwaring would not turn over his car. I could hear engines pulling the other side of the hill.

"Is that a Pegaso?" said Lurio, listening.

"I wouldn't know. Their wheels won't fit ours." We had cast Rudge wheels and the Pegaso has wire ones.

Perhaps you think that those are the ethics of the man: the wanting to get two new tires and race on, even if it were only for a mile more. It was natural for him and I thought it just as natural. Going on, if at all possible, is natural to someone who races. No, only to someone who enjoys racing. Is it a matter of ethics that Lurio enjoyed racing? He did and he infected me with it. I fixed the car for him to go on in. We would go on until the engine seized and then we would sit and wait. It seems more reasonable to wait with the car when it was first broken, rather than destroying it in a try at pushing on. To Lurio it was much more

reasonable, a matter of reflex, to go until the engine stopped, frozen with swollen metal. He expected to get tires from Manwaring and Groder.

The journal goes on about the Pegaso:

Lurio sat on the car's fender to watch the Pegaso come up and around the turn; I climbed into the car to get the two cans of oil that I had jammed behind my seat. I watched the Pegaso through the rear window and the open door of our car. The Pegaso was silver-blue, still accelerating through the notch in the hill; its rear end was down with the acceleration and its front tires lost traction first.

The Pegaso came by us half sideways and very fast. When it left the road it skipped almost completely over the gully; only its front bumper caught and that on the far side of the gully. The car rolled over several times and came to rest; from inside the car I could see only the heads of the driver and mechanic bobbing, four up-turned tires and, finally, a jet of yellow, gasoline flame. Lurio gestured to the men; the car had travelled well past us, then it had skipped and rolled a distance; it was a quarter of a mile away and below us.

I stood with a can of oil in each hand and looked at the burning Pegaso. I un-did the oil filler cap and Lurio said, "Let's help them."

"Yes," I said and put the filler cap on the fender. Then it occurred to me: "Manwaring will come around that turn too fast, too."

"That man is hurt."

The Pegaso driver was holding his mechanic under the arm and was advancing close enough to hear us. The sound of the cars on the other side of the hill was just becoming noticeable. "You help them and I'll go back and avert the massacre."

Lurio did not understand the words.

"Slow Manwaring and Groder down, Plant a flare to slow the rest down." Manwaring and Groder were probably next in the procession.

I held the engine sound in my mind. I hung between it, breaking away to run to the hill crest, and Lurio. In the middle, I punched a wrench handle through the soft aluminum top of an oil can and, muddled, started to pour it into the engine. Lurio ran toward the two men dragging toward us from the Pegaso. I set down the half empty oil can and began to run in the other direction. It was seventy-five or a hundred feet to the notch and Manwaring beat me to it. The Mercedes came over the crest and I was able to look Manwaring straight in the eye with my hands at my sides.

I did not understand what Lurio meant, I was just following the man. I followed him because he seemed to be onto what I wanted. Lurio enjoyed his racing; he sold his services to whomever would give the best price and the best car. He kept up a certain materialism in the value and necessity that he saw in his own service to an employer; but it was the idealism that held me to him — he liked to race and he liked a good car. The Mercedes was a good car, even with the new Alfas out that year; you can see from the journal that he liked to run his race. Lurio said that the tires would be taken care of, when Manwaring and Groder came along. I knew that he knew that the tires would appear and I accepted the knowledge. Manwaring went into the ditch. With that material-balanced-with-ideal knowledge that he had, how could he have not been sure of those tires and gone on living. I did not perceive the fault and fixed the engine; I had so accepted the fact of Lurio's motivation that I formulated my own version of 'press-on-regardless' and put it in his place. Only some phenomenon took me toward the hill crest. Manwaring left me short of my goal.

I pivoted to watch the Mercedes slide off the road and into the gully almost exactly where we had been. At the end of my pivot I saw Lurio running toward the new Mercedes. I

hesitated and yelled finally to Manwaring when I saw his door open and his head rise. "Is Groder behind you?"

Manwaring vigorously nodded 'yes'.

"Come on," yelled Lurio who was almost to Manwaring's car.

I ran back thinking that Manwaring was hurt or his mechanic was hurt or that they were both in danger of having their car catch fire with them still in it.

"Groder will make it around," said Lurio to me as he slid into the ditch beside Manwaring's car. He had the leather-covered wheel changing hammer in his hands.

"No, he won't," Groder would not make it if Manwaring had not. I was half-way down the gully side.

Manwaring's mechanic stumbled out of the car and Lurio beat the hub off Manwaring's intact right front wheel. I started to scrabble back up the wall of the gully. "Life up the car," said Lurio and I slid back and helped Manwaring and his mechanic lift up the car while Lurio pulled the tire and wheel off.

"Lurio," I said, "Groder will go off the road." The sound of Groder's engine was getting louder. He would go off the road and land on top of us.

Lurio pushed the hammer into my hands. "Now get the back wheel off."

I knelt by the back wheel and said, "Lurio?" Then I hit the hub with the hammer. I must have still been dizzy with the fumes; the hammer bounced off the ear of the hub and cut a crease in the rear fender. My second blow loosened the hub and I unwound it with my fingers. They lifted the car and I pulled the tire off.

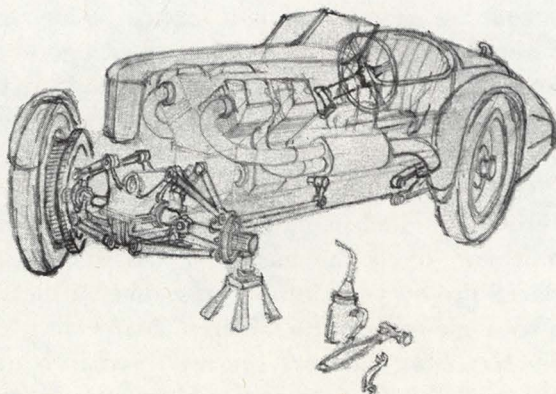
Manwaring and the mechanic helped us get the tires up the incline of the gully. Manwaring helped me and we got our tire to the road first. Manwaring's mechanic was slow and slipped, allowing Lurio's tire to roll back. Lurio cursed fast and in Italian.

Manwaring and I had our tire across the road when Lurio got his to the brink of the ditch. He had carried the tire up in his arms, climbing on his knees. He straightened up and had the tire righted when Groder's car came over the crest. Groder braked and skidded on the gravel; his car hit the upturned fender of Manwaring's car and lifted up. The car went over and Lurio went to his knees as it fell on him.

"Lucien!" I said and lunged, falling across the width of our car toward him.

The crushed wheel and the tire, which regained its form, bounced free as Groder's car rocked back on its roof. I let my head down into the mixed stench of the engine compartment of my car and vomited.

Loring Bailey



Memorandum

(for Gail)

I

*It is the dull ache of crows circling in my mind.
It is the stiff wing of hope flown maimed and away:
feathers left as a portent to be immured in mind-
all to help me remember.
It is trying to remember yesterday's questions,
our conspiracy of sentiment and meaning
gone astray like those
leaves speckled so brown and russet
that we lost in your sister's leather volumes,
or perhaps it was the pages of the family Bible.
Vanities of vanities, says the preacher...
It has been already, in the ages before us.*

*Dawn comes again, insipid and soured,
the chaff of youth gone already;
empty seeds rattling on the wind.
What is the dull whirr I keep expecting to hear?
The plague of chimes from a stranger's funeral?
Upstairs a rickety Puerto Rican lady is taking
her weekly singing lesson;
the reedy soprano rasp turns
like kingfisher feathers in the air,
squandering my abject immunity into silence.
What was it the poet said; "The great spruces loom"?
It is so hard to concentrate on you
with this weir of cockroaches swarming
in my sight and my body
so wretched and stained.*

*This affliction of words and deeds and my mind still
like a clod of earth with its thrumming consciousness.
It is a simple matter of finding the right questions,
the answers will come easy after that.
If we could just capture the proper way of phrasing
our lives, catching the sense of what the con-
cupiscent air is moaning about or what
the ashtrees are getting at when the wind
skitters across their leaves trying to trick
them out of their dullness. When the acrid
summer dust settles across my skin*

I feel sure of my solitude from men
and the exile of sensibility I am
every moment sinking into.
Again I saw all the oppressions that
are practiced under the sun.

In the tapered end of a saffron afternoon
indifferent in its barbarous stretch of hours,
I heard you, love, keening to the seawaves,
standing salt-skinned and withered,
grasping for the hysterical space between
the clangor and silence when the lewd men
who have howled fear into our soft darkness
finally kneel in thick-tongued humility and
the crickets echomellow in perfect harmony.

Is that the salvation you want?
Or is it just a confidence
that the ogre tide will not rise
out of itself shaking
its hoary mane in defiance?

The familial concords embossed in loathing
and a mocking self-sacrifice
still choke our noontide desires;
"Father! Do you see this slavish trembling?
The pale horse of your dreams
is ravishing my sleep!"
And you, rapt muse of my rains,
your sister's promises have turned
and hardened in your veins;
clotted fear gathering in the light;
fear fathering bundles of darkness
in your eyes,
prophesying a worn spirit's imminent
demise.

Hath the rain a father...?
From whose womb did the ice come forth?

Where the slopes of timothy descend into pity,
and the lacustrine trees sweep free of the sky,
we shall huddle in a desperate silence
weaving our mottled love of straw and mud.
The droppings of the sun will splatter on our foreheads.
Leaves like Stygian memory will rise out of the muck
and embrace our shifting prayers.
All that the earth bellows and denies and still
nothing stirs nor glimmers of relief.
Defiance is no answer and pity dances.

The walls of my room stir, they begin to gather
like a house of collapsing cards:
kings, queens, and incestuous spades
tumbling.
The executioner lady upstairs rises
to a splinter pitch; my questions
shatter like chiming crystal.
Whirr...whirr...whirr...whirr...

II

Bowing through the spectrum,
Sinking through near-loves
And the worlds lost,
I kneel in the pew of madness
Trying to remember you and...
Myself, a manic blue-nosed shark
Confused, bouncing upstream—
That is, a salmon plunging like a star
Through the lusty froth trying to reach
Its spawning place to die.
A fiery crocus is swilling
In the afternoon breeze;
You believe
I have not lost you altogether.
Deception, now in the guise of an ivory moon
Is growing like an egg in the needless sky.
My father, hunched in his stone collar,
Unbidden and alone,
Shuffles about the room in his tails
And silk hat like an ancient bridegroom;
Obsessive in his impenetrable distance,
Fearful of my spider eyes that want to crawl
Across his chest, pillage that fortress
Of his flesh. O Father! My lips are cold
With your name that I cannot say,
The grain of all my loves and thought are burst!
Now love, time shudders; long will fall
That weird past, the hot breath

Of our history like a lone
Goose stroking blindly toward the moon.
I remember now how the innuendoes of your flesh
Pulsed and weltered in my haze.
You were so prolific in your nakedness!
In the ripe blue thighs of the past
I rose diverse in idea and desire
As our bodies shook in belief;

*We swam in netted leaves,
Our cedargrove torn by a lanternlight
Flickering; eight days until my
Autumnal fear gave an obscene shudder
And my ragged affections shone like
An arching angelfish; the miracle
Ripped clean from the sky, our flame
Turning like the bitter leaves. There*

*Was a longing fever of days turned
Erratic and finally sundered altogether;
Hard to bare, this stain of solicitude.
And in the day when the keepers of the house
Tremble, the earth will still be no answer
Nor all my remonstrations with need
Or deity of any good;
What now can save me from dispersion?
The dust of leaves rubbed between two
Hot palms, thrown invisible into the
Invisible air. Rain and burning
Have reached their full with me.
Generations cling and shatter; the days
Wailing in my ears, spill headlong into
Winter. Crows are swarming, violent and*

*Human-faced now. Insects hunger my peace,
Gazing like the relentless sun. My grave
Grows old without me. Nothing is returned.
I am my horizon. Sinking moons and suns
Grow into the aching sea (the unmapped past
Without a voice) and so all dissolve,*

Dissolve, utterly.

*Jay Bernstein
New York City
May–Sept. 1968*

Ladybug, Ladybug

The depth of the plate glass window seems to mirror two layers of translucence. In one, Muriel Maxwell sees her reflection distorted as if through a hazy blue filter; beyond her own face she watches people passing by on the street outside the window. The coffee shop has bright orange calico curtains hung from carved mahogany rings that hang behind her head. The sun flashes off the clear Pyrex coffee pots. Bacon and warm toast and coffee melt the air with their warm breath. She turns to the window again. The distorted length of her face framed in long brown hair appears ridiculous in the thick glass, very small, as if she were suddenly back in her childhood. Michael sits across the small wooden table cluttered with coffee cups and bright tin silverware. Muriel looks from the window to her brother.

"God, this coffee is bitter," she says and he nods, a smile playing at the edges of his mouth. He puts more milk and sugar in his; she prefers to drink hers as is. "We'll take a cup of kindness yet....Isn't that what mother used to say?" he asks, running his spoon around the edges of his cup.

"Don't be cute," she says curtly. "I know I've been a hell of a hostess. It was good of you to come so quickly after so many years." She pauses and watches a fat woman burdened with a screaming brat waddle past outside. "The least the bastard could have done is leave me the car," she says. He nods, preferring to say nothing, and his silence stops her on the verge of something. She looks embattled sitting there, her body tense as if waiting for an assault. She sits very straight, her body away from the hardbacked chair, her hands forcefully held in her lap, her knees pressed tightly together.

Outside, heat hurtles in shining waves, invisible flames, from the pavement, early tentative heat. The last days of June have arrived; the leaves of the trees bludgeon the branches as the breathless air rattles through them. They have the curious opaqueness of plastic, heavy and tinted with dust.

"You'll come again soon?" she asks and her face softens.

"Yes," he answers, "very soon." He glances at his watch, picks up his small suitcase and leaves the coffee shop with Muriel close behind. The train pulls into the Madison station across from the coffee shop with a great rumble and whoosh. Michael's face is smeared and sullen through the glass. He sits and mutely watches his sister who stands like a soldier, tall and straight, her arms at her sides, amid the candy wrappers and cigarette butts on the littered siding. She has gotten so much older in the three years since he has heard from her. Her fists are clenched and are held almost tautly against her skirt. The bronze of her skin clashes violently with the dirty metal fence in front of which she stands. She starts to mouth words at Michael through the glass, but they are lost as the train begins to move away, across the desert of northern Jersey toward Hoboken. She stiffens as he drifts from her; she is solid, unsullied, and sad, like a warrior standing proud and fierce on the top of some lonely hill.

Muriel calls a taxi and stands on the siding staring absently down the narrowing tracks. At some point in the future they converge and she thinks about walking down the tracks until she reaches that point, that simplicity. She grinds a piece of broken glass to dust beneath one shoe as she reads the graffiti, none of which makes her blush, on the tattered posters for long dead Broadway musicals.

She thinks of Michael sitting alone near the back of the smoking car, watching the conductor punch tickets through the haze of bluish smoke which hangs like a blanket in the air. Short Hills, Orange, Newark, the smoke outside far thicker than it is inside the car, their relationship now thinner than air, smouldering over the northern Jersey landscape.

It has not always been so, she thinks. She remembers back when they were children, only two years apart in age, remembers the unspoken adulation she commanded in the fifteen year old breast, when she at seventeen would go down to the club, to the tennis courts on those sweltering July afternoons to play with Linda Peckinpaw. He would invariably follow at some distance to watch, she slashing the ball so hard it seemed to leave a smoking trail behind it, hitting the court, starting little brush fires. The sweat poured off her in exciting graceful ways. No one ever saw her lose.

Lose, she says to herself and smiles scornfully. She thinks of her husband Joel and where he is, driving somewhere slowly cautiously in his manner with the car. Thief, she thinks. Coward. She remembers calling Mike and saying "I think Joel's gone for good this time. Oh, but you don't know the history of all this. He's taken the car this time." Mike had sighed and told her to expect him for dinner. He had been there on time.

The next day they went to the lawyer together and learned the steps that would have to be taken one way or the other. She had never hated Joel even though she had always thought she should. His meek inoffensive manner, delineated so sharply after their marriage, so soon after her pregnancy was discovered, infuriated her. She who had always loved a good fight couldn't abide his submission; it enraged her. His leaving had enraged her even more; she had always had a horror of throwing all her strength against evanescence and having it fade at the flimsiest touch. She remembers his sad lined face, his delicate features, his strong straight nose, his high cheekbones, and shivers softly in the hot June wind.

She walks down from the platform to street level and waits impatiently. Douglas should be hungry now, she thinks. The thought of her son, coming unexpectedly as it does, causes great contradictory emotions to sweep her stomach. When the taxi comes, she gets in listlessly and gives her address in a tired voice. She gazes at Madison as the taxi roars through; the few buildings which comprise its diseased heart seem huddled together, embattled, as if in defense against the vast sprawling acres of grass and trees, backyard swimming pools and asphalt, which threaten to engulf it at any time. I have to get some milk, she thinks.

She pays the cabbie and walks up the chipped blue slates and into the house. As the door swings shut behind her, she feels the air, cool and quiet like a funeral parlor or a vault. The room rushes around her, suffocating her. Closing her eyes, she sees the furniture whirl in the air, batter itself against the walls. Quickly she makes a gin and tonic and goes out on the back porch. She looks for Douglas, but he is nowhere to be seen. The wind echoes monotonously with the hollow sound of tennis balls and quick halting steps. Back in the house and out of her view her angora cat stretches, yawns, licks her fur, pads her claws in and out of the side of a chair, walks once around the room. She has left Douglas to himself of late, not even bothering to find him when she went to the train station with Mike.

When her dress begins to stick to her body she goes back into the house and calls her mother. There is no answer; the letter is propped against the salt shaker on the kitchen table. "Dear Muriel," it begins. "I hardly know where to begin. We reap what we sow. I am disappointed and ashamed of your marriage disasters but you are still my daughter and you are welcome here. I am only glad your father is not alive to see this happening. Why don't you call Michael? He says you haven't been in touch with him in three years. Sweep in front

of your own door and get your house in order my girl...." She crumples up the letter and throws it away. She thinks about Mike, about the spaghetti and the wine.

She remembers walking a mile and a half to Kurtney's Package Store to buy a gallon of cheap California wine the afternoon before, determined to celebrate her prodigal brother. She winds in and out of the well kept tree-lined avenues, staying under the overhanging branches out of the sun. Sprinklers splash the air; little children in bathing suits run through them. Her feet shovel loose gravel. At Kurtney's she picks the cheapest wine she can find, a domestic called Vino Fino. She remembers she forgot to tell Michael she was going out. He is sitting on the couch watching Douglas play with the toy truck her mother has brought him when she flings open the door and marches magnificently, triumphantly, into the house, swinging the heavy bottle in front of her. "Look what I got," she says. She notices that Douglas doesn't even bother to look up from his truck.

She gets two large glasses and tells her brother to pour the wine. In the kitchen she slices a loaf of Italian bread and smears it with margarine and garlic salt, and puts it in the oven. She lights a gas burner and puts a pan of water on the stove for the spaghetti. The flames coolly massage the bottom of the pan, every now and then sending tiny shoots of fire up toward the top edges. Muriel stands and watches the fire dance for a few moments and then enters the living room.

Michael is on the floor tickling Douglas, who screams with laughter and tries to crawl away from him. She drains half her glass of wine and sits down. Douglas's face is flushed and red; he rolls on the floor giggling, trying to evade his uncle's anemone fingers. His short stubby legs pound fitfully against the carpet. Eyes wide with laughter, battering his arms, he gets away and slumps exhausted against a soft armchair.

"Michael," Muriel says, "get off the floor, will you? You'd think you were still a child." She drains the glass and pours herself another. "What was that mother always used to say? A glass of wine and thou?" she says. "I'm glad to see you again. You bring back a lot of memories." Michael smiles at her and slowly sips his wine. She gets up and puts the spaghetti in the boiling water.

"What do you think you'll do?" Michael asks when she comes back. He sits slumped against the sofa, his chin sunk against his chest, his eyes electric and nervous, brushing back his hair from time to time. Balding at twenty-seven, Muriel remembers thinking, clucking her tongue.

"God, I don't know," she says. "I guess Joel will have to get in touch with me soon. He didn't even have the guts to tell me where I could reach him. Maybe he's run the car off a cliff somewhere. Good old careful Joel. That would be nice."

Michael stares at her across the void between them. His eyes narrow and fasten on her face. "I have to go back to the City tomorrow, you know," he says. "I can't stay another day," She nods, drains her glass, and pours herself another one. The room becomes luminous. "Joel, please more wine," she says. Sunspots dazzle her eyes as they dance from furniture to carpet to ceiling. She floats, she quivers. She remembers reaching out to take Michael's hand and having him sit back quickly, remembers great billows of black smoke in the kitchen when she thought again of the garlic bread, remembers downing glass after glass of the sour wine, the room lights up, fades, sounds maraud through her head, the clink of glasses, toasts sloppily made, doors slam, radios blare, Joel's voice from somewhere, remembers Douglas crying, her stomach heaves and churns, getting up, faltering, retching in the sink, sweating, furious with herself, waves rush over her, she loses her footing, and pounds her ears, great white foamflecked fingers pummel her, suck at her feet, she tumbles

over and over and over, spinning and falling and turning and twisting and Michael standing over her as she lies in bed, head throbbing, uncertainly smiles up at him, saying her voice chalk scratchy, "Come again soon, will you? Please?" The room turns black, her stomach heaves weakly, she turns over on her side and falls down down through a rapidly narrowing tunnel to rest somewhere on a pillow as light and elusive and protean as air.

She mixes another gin and tonic and goes out to sit on the porch again. The sun nears noon; its rays cast dark outlined shades on her shallow back yard. She remembers the back porch of her childhood home, expansive and spacious, with the trees outside softly moving in the cool breezes of evening, overlooking the property that seemed to stretch forever.

She closes her eyes and sees the house itself, large and brooding; the back yard with the old elm tree and the wooden garden seat her father had built around it, vistas back to the stream and the briar thickets. The house looms larger and larger until it fills the years since she has left it with its echoes and memories. She sees her room at the top of the winding dizzying stairs with its large closet in which she played dolls, the window with its lead encrusted panes of old thick glass, hears remnants of laughter in the parlor in front of the fireplace. She sees her father on his heels, stirring the coals of the fireplace, sees them glimmer, watches sparks fall swift and sudden like comets. She sees Michael the day he fell out of the elm tree and fractured his arm; she sees him reach for the branch, she hears the branch crack and rip with a sound like tearing flesh; she sees him fall silently, swiftly, like a comet, sees the branches part around him, hears the swish of leaves, sees him as he clears the final branch and the ground slams against his frail body; her body wrenches with the sound of his scream. She sees her mother's face when the telephone call comes from the hospital announcing her father's death. She sees the contradiction on the face, the instant lines fading to jelly, she hears the polite thank you, the silent scream, the sharp click of the receiver. She remembers the crab apple tree in the yard next door, the bright red knows swaying when she shook the trunk, the hundreds of apples she gathered with Mike; smells the sweet acidity of boiling apples, the skins floating on the surface, sees the cheesecloth and the dripping syrup, smells the faint aroma of melted paraffin, sees her mother carefully pouring little wax lids. She remembers the laboriously carved lid of the old chest she discovered with Mike in the attic, feels the dust on her fingers, remembers the pictures of the grandparents she never knew, their burning strong and sudden eyes, her grandfather's moustache, feels the airy texture of the velvet ribbons and the lace of her grandmother's wedding gown — like a butterfly's wings, they tear in her hands — sees her brother swashbuckle with the sword, old and rusty, that is also in the trunk. She opens her eyes and recognizes her house, the proper overstuffed furniture, the neat clean carpet, the spotless walls, her kitchen stainless and steely and new. Quickly she shuts her eyes again and her temples throb. The pictures are gone; bright colors seem to mock her. The words are there but the pictures are gone, tumbling over one another like leaves before an autumn wind, uncatchable, flammable.

When the doorbell rings, she is in the bathroom surveying the landscape of her flesh. Her eyes are large, watery, slightly bloodshot. Her blouse and skirt are off as she sits on the side of the tub, carefully going over every inch of her skin for blemishes and scars. She has already stared long and hard at her face, dismayed at the hard lines around the eyes, the slight snarl of the lip that appeared sometime since her marriage, the loss of softness in limbs and torso. Hurriedly she gulps the dregs of her third gin and tonic and pulls on her skirt and blouse as though she were struggling with them, as though they were alive. She pats her hair, gives one last cursory glance of self appraisal into the mirror, and hurries downstairs,

smoothing wrinkles from face and clothes as she goes. "I'm coming," she calls in an attempt at calm refinement and is alarmed at the voice which sounds nothing like her own.

She remembers the face of the magazine boy but not his name. His cotton jersey is the same, the pants different she thinks; his blond hair is plastered to his forehead. He has come back for one last try because she had not been able to make up her mind when he had come before. Tall with a shiny forehead and a curiously broad nose, he had come to the door to say that he needed only 240 points to win a two week vacation in Hawaii and a scholarship to UVa, ("and probably a crosseyed beagle," Muriel had told Joel over dinner that evening and hating him when he didn't even smile) and Look was only \$5.00 for twenty-six issues and would give him sixty-six more points and could he come in and talk things over. She smiles at him sloppily, self-consciously running her hand to her throat, as he stands meekly at the door.

"Hi," he says. "Remember me?"

"Sure," Muriel answers. "Do you want to come in?" She moves backwards holding the door pressed against her stomach like a shield, and the boy walks into the cramped living room littered with magazines, puts down his dossier and shrugs.

"Excuse me a minute," she says, going to the kitchen and getting a clean glass. The gin bottle is almost empty; she remembers her place as hostess. "Would you like a drink?" she calls from the kitchen. "No thank you, m'am. Not while I'm working, thank you all the same." His voice sounds edgy and circular. Oh yes, Muriel remembers. The heavy southern accent. Alexandria, wasn't it? "Is your name Alexandria?" she calls, emptying the gin. "No m'am," he answers. "That's where I'm from. Virginia." She wants to tell him that her name is Muriel not Virginia, but she remembers her place, married, the mother of a son, as she puts the ice tray back in the freezer.

She allows him to go through his selling pitch again, dimly remembering all the words in exactly that order from the time before. He is standing earnestly in front of her as she slouches on the couch, her eyes screwed intently onto his face. A pretty face, she thinks. A little wide from the mouth up, but pretty nonetheless. Sleek, almost animal. Angular; she imagines he is purring. His face becomes fuzzy for a moment. She looks at his eyes, totally losing his words, they are deep and intense, almost disturbing, she thinks. They deepen; she realizes he has been standing in silence for several minutes. "What?" she says. "I said, 'Do you want any magazines?' m'am." She stares at his crotch, at his zipper, and wonders what is hiding there, how long, how thick? He stands at ease, his legs spread slightly, standing tall and straight. The lines of his body please her. Narrow hips, sleek strong legs. He is an upside down Y, she thinks, graceful and elegant.

Muriel mistakes his youthful restlessness and energy for uncomfortableness. "Would you like to sit down?" she asks almost slyly and eyes him beseechingly, hungrily.

"No thank you, m'am. I mean I've got to be going I reckon." His mouth has tightened, his whole body tensed like a verb in its complexity and possibility of action. "My mother always told me 'A rolling stone gathers no moss' and I reckon she was right. I best be on my way. I got a lot of territory to cover."

"Isn't that funny?" Muriel says. "My mother used to say that too. That practically makes us brother and sister."

"Not quite, m'am. I wouldn't go so far as to say that," the magazine boy says and snickers, knowingly.

"Come sit on the couch next to me while I busy my head about the magazines," Muriel says. "Come on now. Don't be shy." Muriel's cheeks are flushed; she tries to remember her

last sentence and is unable. She is dimly aware that the boy knows just what she is doing, has been in this house in front of this woman myriad times. "How much for Look?" she asks. Maybe House and Gardens, she reflects. What did he say his name was? She wishes she could call him by his name, thinking the sound of his name from her mouth would put him at ease. The magazine boy's eyes narrow; he glances at his watch. Skillfully he circumvents the coffee table on which Muriel has placed her legs (has he been leering up my skirt? she wonders with an air of pleased abandon) and sits beside her. Instantaneously she sits up, putting her feet on the floor, edging slightly toward him, every inch bringing her closer, brushing her knee against his carefully pressed corduroy pants. The ripples of the corduroy send shivers up her spine. She wonders if his groin is thickening, widening, the blood spilling into it in burning torrents. She feels hot, stifled; she brushes her hand across her forehead and brings it away glistening. Through the haze in her mind, she lights a cigarette and tries to propel some words through the widening cloud of smoke. "Now what magazines are you selling?" and her voice is shaky. She sees his lips part, his tongue flickers like a dying flame, his chest expands, stretching against his cotton jersey, she wants to stroke his chest, massage his neck.

The magazine boy's entire manner shifts abruptly; he drops the Southern gentleman with as much ease as he assumed it. "Look lady, ya want to buy or don't ya? I'm not pushing." She has hastily smashed out her cigarette and her sticky palm has found his thigh. She senses things are going badly for her, that she is far from in command, that one false step will send her hurtling, far far she remembers the time she escaped through the cupola window and out onto the dazzlingly steep roof. The shingles blinded her, she grappled with them; down below so very far she saw the grass, green and glistening. She felt her feet slip, blind panic gripping her stomach; she glided downward. Her father rescued her. He does not resist. His breathing has become deeper. She feels the texture of the corduroy and the tightening muscles beneath it, rippling, tensing and expanding, with wonder. She watches the bulge in his groin lengthen and spread, creeping along the inside of his thigh closer to where her hand is soothing, massaging. Her mouth drops a little; her eyes widen. Her cheeks burn steadily. When she turns to look at him, imagining languid eyes and heavy breathing, she finds his arms are crossed on his chest and a pursed smile with a bitter aftertaste plays on his lips. When his eyes meet hers, they widen until they are as big as plates. He begins to laugh softly.

Muriel's face drains of all color; her hand stops poised perilously close to the top of his zipper. Slowly she draws it away. Her gorge rises; she feels the backs of her thighs bristle, feels like a ravine, deep and craggy and forlorn.

"You filthy pervert," she snarls. "You filthy dirty pig. Get out of my house this instant." The magazine boy edges away slowly and then moves with the stealth of a cat, swiftly gathering his dossier, moving toward the door.

"Get out. Get out," Muriel screams.

"I'm going," he says. "Fuck off." She picks up an ashtray and hurls it against the door as he closes it behind him. The glass shatters and crackles brittly in the corner. Muriel sinks back and watches as the ashes from the ashtray flutter nonchalantly in the air streams of the room.

She hears Douglas at the back door. "Oh God," she says. "What the hell do you want?"

*

Muriel puts Douglas to bed and brushes her lips across his forehead. He watches her, his eyes wide, all the way out of the door. She backs up as if she is under fire, as if his eyes, riveted as they are to her face, cannot be turned away from. She goes outside into the cool night air; dusk is deepening into evening. She can easily see the back door of the house across from hers, remembering in the summer evenings when she was a child the flickering dots of fireflies backdropped against the limitless blackness of property; no lights but those of her own home. An inexpressible sadness grips her; she wishes she were ten again. She remembers how Michael used to catch fireflies and smear them on his nose and cheeks to frighten her. As she would get further into the stillness near the briar thickets, the lights in her house would twinkle like far away stars. She remembers her mother sharply; a short silent stately woman, fond of homebacked truths. She remembers how her mother would say as she put her to bed "Be it ever so humble there's no place like home," every night until it grew to have far greater significance than it would ever have had otherwise, a wisdom and deepness far beyond the sound of the words. Judy Garland clicking those glass slippers.

Humble, Muriel thinks. That's a laugh. Her father, humble and self-effacing, quiet and contemplative, rarely given to words, coming out into the evening to call his children in, a soft word or two, floating across the cool night air with the force and grace of the stream that edged their property. She remembers the time Mike hid in the briar thicket and then crept into the house unapprehended while her father spent the hours usually spent in reading carefully combing every inch of the property, and then forgiving him with the style of his years by a quiet kiss as he lay sleeping.

"Mike," she says when he finally answers the phone. "I've been trying to get you all day." She sounds breathless, excited.

"Hi," he says. "How are you?"

"Mike. I've just been outside looking at the sky and I just saw a falling star. I remembered how Daddy used to stir the coals in the fireplace and all the sparks would fly. And then I felt a long cool breeze. You know how hot it's been for the past few days. Fresh air, you know? Do you remember how Mom used to say 'Oh Lord, feel those ocean breezes?'" She giggles.

"Muriel, are you all right?"

"I'm fine. I'm fine." Her voice sounds soothing, melodic. She stops and tries to catch her breath. "I've decided to sell the house." She is greeted by silence. "Mike?"

"Don't you think you should wait until you hear some word from Joel?"

"Why if it isn't the voice of reason. I want to get out of here, Mike. I feel stifled, pent up. Joel and I can work it out somehow."

"When did you decide this?"

"Oh, today, I guess. I've been thinking about it for a long time. Since I saw you I been thinking about when we were kids. Those were the good old days, you know? I think I want to travel a bit, go see Mom, go back to our old stomping grounds for a few days and then get an apartment somewhere, I don't know where. I'm coming to the city tomorrow to take care of a few things and I'd like to meet you for lunch. OK?"

"What about Douglas?"

"Who? Oh, Douglas. I'll get a sitter or something." She sounds impatient; the groundwork has been laid and she wants to get off the phone.

"I think I'm busy tomorrow."

She ignores him, charges on in her stridence and excitement. "I'll meet you at the

Everglades at 12:30. I'll even pay. OK?"

"How can I turn down a free meal?"

"It's settled then? See you tomorrow."

"Yeah Muriel. Goodbye."

The phone goes dead in her ear. She holds it a while, musing, listening to the static and finally the dial tone. She smiles to herself and gently places the receiver back into its cradle.

She goes up the stairs to see if Douglas is asleep. He is on his back, one arm flung behind his head, small and spindly, almost lost in the folds of the pillowcase. His mouth is open and the room is filled with his measured breathing. The streetlight through the window sends tiny flickering fingers of light across his forehead, miniature flames. His soft slight hair has fallen off his face revealing a fine full forehead. A mouth like a fish. Muriel thinks. Delicate nose, slightly off center; high cheekbones. Looks like his father, Muriel thinks. A slight shudder of revulsion courses her spine. She leans against the door as if in pain. Her hand covers her eyes.

Downstairs she tries to read the newspaper but can't. Nagged by thoughts of Joel she turns on the TV but quickly loses interest. The telephone rings and she leaps to answer it. "Oh," she says in disappointment, "it's only you."

*

Muriel walks down the avenue, bumping into people and around them. The New York air is very hot and thick and still. She passes a church; its long thin spires scratch the sky, pierce the clouds. A large black limousine is pulling up to the curb. It is followed by a hearse decked with flowers. Bells begin to toll. The sun shoots flames across the spire. People get out of the limousine; a small frail woman in a black lace dress stuffs a handkerchief into her mouth. Muriel remembers: The church is very dim and quiet; organ music wafts out from behind a curtain in back of the altar. Three candles burn steadily sending thin black streams of smoke hastening into the upper reaches of the church. The smoke eddies there in little pools among the piers of the vaulted intricately carved ceiling. The light shines in through the multicolored glass causing everything to appear violet. The man lying in the coffin before her is cold and very dead. She realizes with some difficulty that he was her father. The cheeks are sunken and sallow, great age lines stream from the eyes and wrinkle the cheeks like the folds of tissue paper. She remembers her father on those summer nights when his voice, so calm, so sweet, rang out into the air with the clarity and resonance of chimes. Somewhere above her a bell begins to toll, long, sombre, foreboding. She kneels on the velvet cushion; hot tears rise within her. She knows they are welling there like lava, are ready to burst forth to scald her cheeks. The velvet and old smoked wood, the rich deep polished browns and scarlets, are decadent, sumptuous. The bell tolls; its reverberations are deep, empty, hollow. The priest intones; ashes to ashes, dust to dust. She sees her father in flames, great red fingers licking his skin. Her memories of the past scatter as the cold wind of retrospection blows the ashes away, tumbling over one another, slowly, finally. Michael is kneeling beside her. His body next to hers, the ache of memory, the times they have been together act somehow as a buffer between her and that cold dead man in the box. Six men dressed in black approach the coffin. Muriel stands; she sheds the tears of childhood. She knows she must stand tall and strong and true. A great wrenching sob surrounds her heart, cracks it, solidifies it; she stifles it. Throughout her body she feels the blood slowing, by her force, by her will. Her smoothness and fluidness turns awkward, frozen, silent. Michael grabs the sleeve of Muriel's black velvet dress to pull her down beside him, to keep her next to him. "Please don't go," he whispers. "I need you." "Let go of my arm, you little twirp," she

hisses. The face is stone, great furnaces burn in her eyes, and she shakes herself loose and walks down the aisle. Michael follows her with his shattered face all the way down the long dark interminable aisle until she is out of the church. The six men in black pick up her father. She remembers the house after her father is buried, the hollow sound her shoes make in the long hardwood halls, the way the family sits quietly at meals as though her father's once silent place is to be imitated by all of them. The intimate seeds of hate and years begin to grow between Muriel and her brother. She remembers this sharply etched period in her life as buried in time as she walks down the avenue, bumping into people, around them. She is already slightly late for lunch.

Muriel leans against the glass door of the Everglades. It gives way slowly, yawning open. She goes down the three steps and walks across the hardwood floor. The air is heavy and thick; great red velvet curtains line the walls and cover the windows that look out upon 47th Street. The great mirror that stretches the length of the waterringed formica bar, reflecting the small print of the bottles that guard it, is surrounded by blinking Christmas lights. A pall hangs in the air; Muriel seats herself at a corner table and orders a gin and tonic. Michael is late, she thinks. When he enters, she follows him with her eyes as he picks his way among tables to meet her.

Muriel smiles as he sits down; she offers him her hand. He takes it and squeezes it slightly; it is cold and wet from the drink she has been wrapping it around.

"So good of you to come," she says.

"So good of you to ask me," he counters.

They stare for several minutes at the menus, knowing that they are spending too much time for the length of the list of food. When the waitress comes, a middle-aged woman with a figure like a rhutababa, Michael orders a chicken salad sandwich and a bottle of Budweiser. Muriel orders a fruit salad with cottage cheese and another gin and tonic.

"Joel called last night," she says, "after I talked to you. He's seen the lawyer and has started the proceedings. For a moment I considered not granting it to him but when I thought how perverse that would be, how ugly, I decided against it. He says I can have charge of Douglas."

"Oh, that's good," he says and smiles encouragingly. A slight jerk crosses her lips. Very gradually the face shifts; the lips lower, the eyes harden, the cheekbones accentuate.

"I don't want the little bastard," she says and her voice is cheddar sharp.

Michael looks at the table. "What did he say about the house?" he asks.

"He said I can sell it or keep it, as I want. I still want to sell." The waitress brings the drinks; Muriel lights a cigarette, holding the match at the end for a very long time. She wraps her hand around the sweating glass as a snake wraps itself around its prey. "I'm really looking forward to going back to Scarsdale," she says. "I haven't been back there since I married Joel. Do you remember the walks we used to take every night after dinner? I used to pretend you were courting me and when you asked me to marry you I planned to say no."

"I remember all those times I watched you play tennis. All those goddam afternoons. Why would you never play with me?"

"Because you were never any good," she says as she stubs out her cigarette. Her elbows are on the table; her hand is to her mouth. "I'm thinking of taking an apartment in New York. So I can be close to you."

The blood rushes to Michael's cheeks; they burn insistently. Muriel doesn't notice. She stares at the cherry sitting atop the mound of white curds. It seems to stare back at her.

"What do you think of that?" she asks.

"Did you know they put a federal highway through the old property?" he asks. "Since Mom sold the place we haven't kept in touch with what's gone on back there."

Muriel's eyes close suddenly and then squeeze tightly shut. Strong lines mar her forehead. Her eyelids flash pictures at her. Bulldozers, yellow and vicious, maraud through her house, snapping at it. The tall trees fall slowly and silently sending up great clouds of dust. Dump trucks and road graders; the house tumbles and flattens, the glass cracks, the shingles splinter; a great yellow mouth tears at the stream, plows it. The trees fall in a little row; one, two, three. Shock waves from the impact register on Muriel's face.

She falters slightly. "I found a ladybug last night," she says, "when I was outside looking at the stars. I heard this whirring and when I looked down, there was this ladybug on my shoulder. You know? Tiny and orange with little black dots? Mom used to say they were good luck. I picked it up and tried to make it fly away. Do you remember that old nursery rhyme Mom used to tell us when we were little? 'Ladybug, ladybug, fly away home...' And she flew away. That's when I decided to sell the house. Mike, I can't go on living there." Her voice trembles for a moment. She lights another cigarette and stops, filtering her thoughts through the smoke.

They eat for a few minutes in silence. She smiles at him across the table, reaches out her hand and lays it on his arm. The tweed of his jacket is fibrous, scratchy.

"Mike, why don't you and I go up to Scarsdale this weekend and visit the old place. We could lunch at the Inn and then to the house and tell the people living there that we..."

He looks across the table at her, down at her hand now clutching the edge of his jacket. "I told you the house has been razed. Destroyed. There's nothing left there. The whole property is being turned into asphalt."

Her hand relaxes its grip, warily retreats, and begins to drum on the table. Her face is very pale. "Well," she says and becomes very businesslike. "What do you think about my moving to New York?"

"I don't think you should," Michael says. A look of mild astonishment crosses his face as though he cannot believe his own words. "New York is a hell of a place for a kid to grow up. Why don't you stay in Jersey? Move if you have to but not to the city." He pauses for a moment "Besides. I don't want you to."

All of a sudden she is very busy. She rocks in her chair, takes a ten dollar bill out of her pocketbook. "I have to be going," she says brightly, brittly. Her mouth is wide in a sick smile; lava churns in her stomach. "Good to see you again." She stuffs the bill into his hand and hurries out the door. Michael leans back and stares at the curds of cottage cheese which litter her plate. The bill comes to \$6.73. He pockets the change and goes back into the city, the heat and the light.

*

When she gets home again, Douglas is on the front steps crying. His cheeks are red and muddy from where he has rubbed them with his tight little fists. Muriel wonders how long he has been sitting there but doesn't bother to ask. She picks him up, still crying, and wrestles with the key as she balances him on one hip. The front door finally swings open. She had been unable to get a sitter and has left him alone outside since morning. She realizes he has not eaten all day. Overhead, clouds are beginning to crease the air.

As she lights the gas burner she watches the flames intensely; They are blue and yellow and make a thin hissing noise. While the pork chops are sizzling, she goes into the living room to see what Douglas is doing. He shies away from her like a horse from fire and cowers

near a corner of the living room. "Come here you little brat," she says almost savagely. He wavers; suddenly he runs at her, against her, wrapping his arms around her legs, burying his face between her knees. For a moment he knocks her off balance and she feels as if she is about to fall, a sickening dizzying plunge to the floor, but she regains her balance, almost wanting to kick at him, to get him away from her. He lets go and she stoops and picks him up roughly and carries him upstairs to the bathroom. She wets a washcloth and wipes his cheeks clean in short swift strokes. He looks at her uncertainly, his fists clenching and unclenching, as he wavers on the edge of the tub, not knowing whether to cry again or not.

She cuts up a pork chop into tiny pieces and dishes out some chopped spinach onto Douglas's plate, pouring the rest onto her own. Douglas screws up his face in displeasure but knows better than to say anything. "Would you like to move, honey?" she asks with her mouth full of spinach. Douglas looks at her quizzically, picks up a piece of pork chop with his fingers and tentatively puts it into his mouth. "You and Mommy are going to move away from this ugly town," she says. "We'll make a nice home somewhere, just you and me, huh baby?" Douglas chews up the pork chop and swallows, staring at his plate. His short chubby legs have begun to kick against the leg of the kitchen table. "Stop that this instant," Muriel says. Douglas slips out of his chair and runs into the living room.

While Muriel is washing the dishes, she lights the gas burner again to make some tea. She watches the flames dancing silently, whispering, beckoning to her. She tries to remember if the insurance policy covers fires. Her movements become stealthy, breathless. She leaves the dishes soaking and decides against the tea.

"Time for bed, honey," she calls, horrified at her own calm, her detachment. "Come on. Time to go to sleep." She takes Douglas upstairs to his room and undresses him, wondering at the smoothness of his skin, the trust which enables her to put him to bed, the exhausted pursed lips, the red whimpering eyes. She tucks him in and tiptoes from the room when she is swept by a wave of tenderness and sorrow, struck by the enormity of what she was about to do. She sees Douglas in flames, charred bones, singed hair; screams stop her heart. Tears spring to her eyes and she shoves them aside. She runs to Douglas and buries her head in the hot dryness of his neck. He is tired and wants to sleep; he writhes under the pressure, squirms out from under her and turns toward the wall. Her heart pounds fiercely. Horrified by his indifference she takes small unbelieving steps backwards. You bastard. You little bastard, she thinks. Her movements become economical, machinelike. With determination she smooths the wrinkles of her dress, pats the back of her hair, massages the redness of her knees. She walks downstairs with short quick steps and gets a wooden kitchen match from the box beside the stove. In the living room she strikes it against the wall. It leaves an ugly scar. All is quiet. She watches the edge of the match burning steadily, flaring, dying, sees the orange glow on the wall. Stooping she lights the bottom edge of the drapes and runs from the house. Once outside she walks swiftly away, never looking back.

After Muriel leaves, the drapes flare up impressively. The flames curl up the flimsy fabric, tongues licking higher, fingers pulling themselves up, a brilliant orange spider crawling swiftly toward the ceiling. The flames gather speed and intensity. They leap, they chortle; they crackle and snarl, spitting angry bursts of flame at the walls. The ceiling scorches; great brown tongues lash across its white expanse. The room is full of a searing orange; great black dots blister the walls. The flames surge upward furiously. The spider falls and dies; the fingers reach no more. They are gone as quickly as they have come, leaving nothing but ashes on the singed carpet and those ugly blisters and scorches on the walls and ceiling.

Muriel has begun to run. Her hand goes to her mouth and she bites her knuckles. Three

blocks away against the backdrop of the thickening sky she sees the lights of West's Pharmacy. Great heaves shake her stomach; her teeth chatter. She is sorry she thinks.

When she gets to West's she is breathing so quickly and so heavily that she stands for a second, leaning against the glass door, her hand on her chest. She walks quickly to the phone booth and realizes she has no money. She goes to the desk and asks the boy if she can use the phone. She knows him from somewhere, a tall boy with short black hair and a nose like a carrot. He smiles and when he tries to make conversation, she cuts him off sharply. His smile fades. She picks up the phone.

When the operator answers, she says in between gasps, "I want to report a fire."

"One second please," the operator says, and for one sickening moment the line goes dead. When the fire department answers, she repeats her statement. "One-eleven Elm Street," she hears herself say and she hangs up. The boy behind the counter asks, his face creased with concern, "Your house?" She looks at him; her eyes tunnel in on his mouth. Blackness surrounds the red coals of his lips. She nods and wheels, hurrying out the door and back down the street.

Fire sirens fill the air with great moaning wails; huge grey clouds churn the sky. A cool breeze has sprung up. Heat lightning flickers against the livid sky. Muriel stands on the corner under the big elm tree and watches the firemen standing puzzled in front of her house. The axes are ready to shatter walls, windows; water trickles from the fire hydrant with which they have been fussing. She thinks they are looking for signs of smoke, someone who can tell them they are in the right place, but she stays where she is and can see none herself. The wind echoes down the long lonely street, playing with the leaves on the elm tree over her head, turning their backs. She can see their veined undersides coated with dust and thinks of her hands, her legs. A small crowd has gathered and is staring at her house. Doors open up and down the street. The tableau is frozen, illuminated by the flashes of fire which course the sky. She remembers that way in the past when she was a child her mother always said that the backsides of leaves were a sure sign of rain. The great drops come, slowly, surely, and as they hit the leaves over her, Muriel imagines the sound to be that of tennis balls, soft hollow pops, as they hit the court and skitter off, leaving little brush fires burning.

Steve Bauer

The Morning of the Seventh Day

*My angel saunters on the window-sill,
cocks cheerfully a finger at the pad.
A pencil shudders in my hand. I've had
it up to here, hot rhythms, had my fill*

*of poetry this week, ten sonnets in
six days. It's time to rest, be normal now;
read quietly tomorrow. — Was my vow
that serious? put fully into sin?*

*Intensity & heavy lassitude,
the cycle will slip back. More clarity
would further me, a quicker aptitude*

*for iambs. Let it, heaven savagely
unloose. I wouldn't, couldn't care much less.
I smile up to you, in a daze undress.*

Days of 1969

*A street lamp hums, throws down a gallows' pall.
The gutter snakes; phlegm overruns the street.
I think of odd Nerval that night, with all
(those tenements will crumble in defeat)*

*in ready: coil around his neck, with two
(was it three?) poems. Would a passerby—
some drunk or launderess— through that jaw-blue
night, threaten him? —They slept. Hope was a lie,*

*the lonely urge finality. I
A grim depression, almost absolute,
strangled all my days that year. The eye*

*screwed blood-shot in despair; foul water, soot
filled every mouth. Rope whistled in the wind:
sweet song. And once a cool blade glittered, grinned.*

Willard Bright

Late Night April

*It happened so quickly,
something to dissolve your dream.
The words float raggedly around,
circling, almost holding hands
to leave you out
or cut you off.*

*You waver, and sound
as though you're breathing over rocks,
the rasp and retreat of winter tide.
Air sputters in your chest,
a mute pattern preparing you to cry.*

*A distance drowned her syllables,
made them flat as water;
Damn the phone, you'd say.
Nothing much left to cling to,
the liferaft's gone.
And then you know;
she's defined herself, and gone away.*

Suzanne D. Wilsey

Aye

Jacob Aye stared into the bathroom mirror as he often did, hoping to see a face. It would have made everything so easy: a simple face with a cheek and jaw to shave, a hairline to recede, and two eyes to see. But as usual, there was no face there.

This time there was an ordered landscape. It was a faintly familiar scene — like something borrowed from his childhood. There was a smooth-flowing river and along the bank a park with smooth-flowing walks. Along these paths there were wrought-iron benches and shade trees and a few meticulous flower beds each labeled with a bronze plaque reading, “Keep Off.” The river’s course was straight as time itself, but for variety’s sake a series of inlets had been carved to form lagoons along the shore. The main walk was parallel to the river — its echo, in fact; but diversionary paths passed over little ornate bridges to small, man-made islands, returning again further along. It was an orderly, reassuring scene. Everything was in its place.

Only three things moved upon this rather Victorian landscape. There was, first, the river itself. The ripple of wavelets skittered like rustling leaves so that Aye knew this was no photographic backdrop. It was a real river, all right, though what that made of the mirror in which he was viewing the river was another question. He tried to back away from the mirror, ducking the question like an educated gentleman, but he was held there by the charm of the scene and the lethargy of a Saturday morning.

The other two moving things were people. One was a man in an expensive black topcoat, velvet on the collar, black derby hat, velvet trim on his sleeves, broad-backed, and swinging a cane. He walked with a military briskness on the concrete path like a British colonel of the old school who has an appointment with Death. He walked at unvarying speed, regular as that dark river just beyond the landscaped lagoons. He walked without looking at the concrete squares which passed under him like the leaves of an enormous calendar. He even stepped on the cracks.

The park benches and the shade trees flowed by him, so Aye knew that the walker was real and the landscape a moving backdrop, or perhaps the walker was only a coat stuffed to look like a man and the river real. Again he tried to back away from the mirror.

Behind the man by thirty paces was a boy in an expensive blue coat, velvet on the collar, blue sailor hat, and velvet in his heart. He took two quick steps for each one of his father’s, but his two little steps were an inch shorter than his father’s one. He held his hand to his heart because it was not easy to take two steps for every one and to see the distance between them steadily increase and to know that one day the man in the black derby hat would cross a Victorian bridge over a rippling lagoon never to be seen again.

“Hey Dad, come on!”

How long had the boy been shouting? He disliked distractions. But that was life — distractions. And this was going to be one of those distracting days. Like the previous one. It was only yesterday that they had almost fired him for doodling an intricate design of a round, Victorian mirror frame. He had decorated it with hundreds of golden leaves overlapping like wavelets on some distant lagoon, and they had shone in a way that did credit to his drafting table and his corner of that enormously bleak room. All the time he had thought he was preparing preliminary sketches for the latest suburban branch of B.

Altman, Inc. Aye had been assigned to B. Altman for at least a lifetime. So they had a right to give him hell for his golden doodle — he should have been working. But now it was Saturday. Was dreaming illicit here too?

“Hey Dad, let’s go.”

He took one last look in the mirror and seeing the three things that moved, wondered which one was calling. It could have been any one; and in fact he wondered if perhaps they all spoke — the river, the man, and the boy — all with the same lines of dialogue but not in unison. No, alternately, the way one’s eye jumps from this bed to that when viewing the formal squares of a Victorian garden.

Unshaved — the mirror only confused him on weekends — he stepped outside into a bleak autumnal clutter. Leaves had littered his lawns and gardens like so much rubbish. Incredible, he thought, that each one had once been a unique bud unfurling green and live, a complete creation with its own delicate veins. And now, dry as onion skins, they were like the discarded drafting sheets of a lifetime. It was hard to believe that so many revisions had been done, that so many sheets were ready for sweeping. He stooped down and smoothed one out on his knee and read the words, “Jacob Aye stared into the bathroom mirror as he often did, hoping to see a face.” It startled him to see it there so soon.

“God, Dad, let’s get to it.”

He dropped the sheet guiltily as if someone had told him that he should again B. Altman. He could see that this enormous autumnal clutter had to be cleared, had to be ordered. He would have to start at one end and rake toward the other systematically.

Jesus, he muttered silently, let’s get to it.

He began working with a military vigor, swinging his cane like a broom. “The place must be cleared,” he said briskly — though with a faint heart, a heart of threadbare velvet. Beside him the dark asphalt flowed in stately fashion, silent as an electric clock, assuring him that he was real, or perhaps that it was real, a moving belt, and he, mounted upon it, a bobbing cardboard target for Death.

It was too late now to think of each leaf as a separate draft, a new revision. There were too many. They were only clutter. As they spun in the drafty air, dry as yesterday’s *Times*, they turned before his very eyes to rubbish: post cards, old letters, gift lists, road maps, travel folders — had he really been to Rome and back? Candy wrappers, bank receipts, faded menus, comic pages of Superman and Sandman, film cartons, sandwich bags, condoms, ant-specked cookie cartons, yellowed Kleenex, toilet paper....

“Let’s make one tremendous pile and jump in it!”

His stomach lurched. He shoveled with a kind of grim determination. How would they ever get the place clear? Perhaps the best they could do would be to make token paths, the age being what it was. But why not formal paths? Victorian walks and landscaped gardens midst mushrooming filth. Why not? Drain the swamps and let the waters be gathered into one place and let the dry land appear and call the waters Lagoons and the land Earth and he would see that it was good. Then he would let the earth bring forth grass and....

“We can? Honest?”

Good God, what a question! Could they, the two of them? Wasn’t it impious or at least presumptuous? The question echoed distantly like childhood memories of Rome.

Could there ever again be an esplanade with grass-edged walks? Worse, had there ever really been such?

Well, surely the ever-flowing river had been, in that cool-gold age of his childhood, caught momentarily and diverted slightly into landscaped lagoons, time bent for their genteel

pleasure. Aye was certain of that much. And the sedate bridges and wrought iron benches and formal paths for genteel walkers had all existed even if the grass and flowers had been cardboard and could not be touched. And somehow their system of rubbish removal had been far superior. Was it possible now, in his own time, midst all this filth, to build an esplanade and buy a black coat and a derby? But what of the cost? The cost would be heavy. This was a chilly thought and he pulled his collar high against the autumn winds which swept in from the asphalt river.

Swirling, the rubbish mounted: crumpled blueprints, tattered posters saying "Uncle Sam is Watching You!" "Malcolm Lives!" "Bury the Bomb!" "Smoke a Camel!" – such bizarre demands! And between them, filtering down like cold, volcanic ash, all kinds of little filthy slips: plastic-covered credit cards, playing cards, memberships, and draft cards; licenses for dogs, cats, dance halls, and analysts; certificates for births, marriages, Grade-A milk, and madness; guarantees for innersprings, potency pills, diaphragms, and shotgun shells; green stamps, postage stamps, Easter Seals, and tax stamps; wallet-sized snapshots of Junior, Sonny, and adolescent Jesuses. All frayed. All used and re-used. All fly-specked. All torn, sooty, and crumpled. And they continued to sift down, shifting and spinning in the smoggy light, alighting all about him, sticking to his head and shoulders, sliding down his neck. His skin itched with their scratching insistences.

"We're not even holding our own," he said, startled at the unease in his voice.

"Sure we are. Look at the path."

Yes, there was a path. Not, perhaps, a formal path; but it was clear ground. He could see grass, real grass. It formed a wobbly circle around a pile, returning to where the two of them stood. It was a ragged, absurdly formless sort of circular path and instead of marching militarily in the same direction, they merely stood there, half-facing each other shyly like two very young lovers. Neither of them wore a derby. Jacob eyed the two of them eyeing each other and knew that he was one of them and that the path was something they had made together, but he couldn't tell for sure which character he was. Like the trick drawing of stairs which seem to run up and then down, he was one and then the other, first Jacob and then his father, Isaac.

He remembered hearing about how, in the early days of flying, men would come to the fields outside of Paris to watch the planes wheeze and sputter, and how the sight of these machines actually jumping into the air would bring tears to the eyes of the watches. Jacob Aye saw the landscape of limitless filth around him blur and fade.

"Come on, jump!"

He held back. Was it possible, he wondered, that God had risked creating terror and pain without being dared by some innocent? How quiet, how peaceful, how orderly it must have been for Him when he was the Lord of uncreated universes, Master of pre-cosmic silence. With His feet up and His eyes half-closed, a Great Procrastinator could have gone on dreaming through the ages without risking so much as a cut finger or a pang of hunger. Aye stood there wondering what possible motive there could have been to turn safe fantasies into perilous lives – and deaths! Surely the bearded story-tellers had got the whole sequence ass-backward; surely some laughing Jesus baby had shouted to Him, "Come on, jump!"

But still Aye hesitated. And not surprising, really. For how many years had Jacob maneuvered for his father's blessing, following behind the blind and dying man at thirty paces? Two lifetimes at least – if you count the time Aye spent marching at a military clip with the boy trotting behind like a pup with a wolf's heart. Aye, he had been both marcher and trotter while on his tour along the bank of that dreadful river; and now it was autumn

and the wind was blowing cold. Aye realized that he must act at once if his blood was ever going to warm his heart.

So he jumped. Gloriously. A great flurry of golden leaves far more dazzling than those on his drafting table rose about him in the freshened air. This was no doodle. He thrashed like a pup in new grass. Then in an hour-long instant of pause he looked into the pupil of the other Aye half expecting to see a landscape. But this time he saw his own reflection. It was the face of a laughing child, aged in the autumn light, golden-young midst the splendor of dying leaves. The light played tricks and simultaneously each boy won his father's blessing.

Stephen Minot

*The mind deceives
So I trust my feet
I walk a while
And listen to my footsteps
They tread on ground.
Void of concreteness
The mind
Parasites on memory
And distorts its edges round.*

*My feet bear me
The mind Only adds weight.
You see gravity
Pulls down
So I trust my feet.*

Changez Sultan

Apology

*Listen, no one can tell
where things will lead,
or what matters
in the long run.
You've done your best
to wish me well.
I know how much
you'd give and have;
you cannot live for me
and you have suffered
for yourself.*

Afterwards...

*Will the desert mouse miss us,
or the rabbit be relieved
to no longer rush, startled,
at our headlights?
The park squirrel won't look up,
hearing the footsteps of no one
coming towards his tree.
The snow might fall,
uninterrupted, for years,
driven by less than the wind
into the moving waters of a river
where the carp die, at the bottom of old age
and bloated birds squat in the road
Suppose a certain stroke of lightning
and the forest burns itself
down, in accidental passion;
later, beetles probing the ground,
and the old snake curled-up and asleep,
might almost think of us
when they hear voices calling
or a slight rain hitting the rocks.*

Dori Katz

Plato's Intentions

Plato's Symposium. By Stanley Rosen. Yale University Press. 1968. 346 pp. \$10.00.

One of the most significant directions which modern philosophy has taken might be characterized as the movement from the ancient view that any account of phenomena (or becoming, or existence, or history, or time) must *begin* from within that situation to the view that there is nothing else but that situation; that Being is itself a happening. The outstanding contemporary spokesman for this view is undoubtedly Martin Heidegger, but he is hardly alone. It is perhaps appropriate, then, that a book which stands in opposition to this modern view should be presented in the guise of a scholarly commentary on an ancient work. The title of Stanley Rosen's book, *Plato's Symposium*, and the table of contents, might lead one to expect yet another scholarly commentary on a Platonic dialogue. But in fact, one important theme of the book is to call into question precisely the modern view outlined above, to argue that from the Platonic standpoint, "genesis is not intelligible in its own terms, whether as simple beautiful or both beautiful and ugly,"¹ but that instead, "In Platonic language genesis is held together, and so kept moving, by the 'intentional' structure of Eros, which strives for its completion or satisfaction through possession of or friendship with the noetic order. In this sense the generated cosmos is 'a moving image of eternity'. As so erotically constituted, genesis is midway between nonbeing and being."²

Early in the introduction to this book, Rosen italicizes what might be called the main principle of his interpretation of Plato. He says, "Only by the recognition of irony as the central problem in the interpretation of Plato do we honor the demands of rigorous and sober philosophical analysis."³ He thus establishes from the outset that one important point of his book is a methodological one. He is offering us a hermeneutic of the dialogue form. Yet, at first glance, the quoted statement might not seem sufficiently noteworthy to be italicized as a principle which sets one's book apart. Almost all books on Plato take note somewhere in the introduction of his abilities as an ironist, and the term "Socratic irony" is commonplace even in nonphilosophic circles. But in Rosen's hands, this principle gets employed with a depth and philosophical relevance all too rare among Platonic commentaries. Its immediate implication for Rosen is that a serious and thorough effort must be made to join together the theoretical content of what the speakers say with the dramatic background, especially the speakers themselves, their character, interests, and status as thinkers. As he puts it, "Since it is the human condition to dwell, even as philosophers, within the domain of opinion, an accurate portrait of philosophy must reflect its context, or the manner in which it emerges in human life. In this specific sense, the dialogue is an existential portrait rather than a philosophical treatise."⁴ Thus, Rosen's claim is nothing less than that Plato may have already accomplished the task that many contemporary thinkers espouse: to bring the theoretical issues of philosophy into a context of human experience or *Lebenswelt*. But the hermeneutical problem of the dialogue is more complex than this. In addition to reflection upon the relation between characters and what they say, the question of Plato's own intentions must at every moment be raised. "There is a dialectic between the speech of the characters and the silence of the author, whose subtlety alone determines the degree of complexity to which speech and silence are interwoven."⁵

Thus, Plato's intentions are accessible, but not simply contained in the theoretical content of the various speeches. The effort, then, to reflect upon the relation between speeches, characters, and Plato's own intentions must be guided by the most minute "talmudic" examination of every nuance of the dialogue, and this Rosen does with a thoroughness that would satisfy the highest ideals of 19th-century German scholarship. At the same time, Rosen is as far as possible from being a 19th-century scholar. His scholarly investigations lead him to reflect – in Platonic terms to be sure – on the most contemporary of philosophic issues. These reflections, as he himself admits, are necessarily "speculative." Thus, he rightly warns, "Some readers may find my mode of analysis to be excessively talmudic, whereas to others it may seem too speculative."⁶ His point, of course, is that only by practicing the two in conjunction – what might be called "talmudic speculation" – do we attain to the most fruitful reading of the dialogues.

With this mixture of scholarship and speculation, or what he might call sobriety and madness, Rosen takes us through an intriguing interpretation of each of the speeches in the *Symposium*, and of the dialogue as a whole. Because of the intricacy of his analysis, any effort at summarizing these interpretations would, I fear, be pointless, misleading, and in any case untrue to the spirit of his own – and Plato's – conception of philosophy. I would like, instead, to offer the following considerations.

Like the dialogues and like Eros itself, there is a kind of incompleteness about Rosen's book, not in the sense of a failing but in that it points beyond itself in several directions. One direction I have already indicated; the fruitfulness of Rosen's method of interpretation of the *Symposium* suggests – and he certainly intends this – that it be applied to other dialogues as well. But second, and again like the dialogues, the book leaves us with a certain number of *aporiai* about Rosen's own thinking. This in turn leads the reader – or me at least – to want to ask a few questions and perhaps offer some thoughts of my own. Let me dwell on a few of these.

As I indicated in my opening remarks, Rosen interprets the *Symposium* as centering around the issue of genesis and its relation to Eros. At the risk of oversimplifying his interpretation, the early speeches, culminating in Agathon's, tend to identify Eros with genesis and the body. The teaching of Diotima which Socrates relates preserves the close relation between Eros and genesis, but adds a new dimension to Eros, that of the daimonic, which somehow places it *in between* the mortal and the divine. As Rosen interprets the speech, however, the tension between these two aspects of Eros does not get preserved. "From the time of this substitution (of "the good" for "the beautiful" at *Symposium* 204dff.) Eros ceases to be described as a daimon but has its source in the generated or corporeal instead. This means that Eros is no longer intermediate between men and gods as something other than either, but is a fundamental aspect of genesis itself."⁷ Now, it is not yet clear to me why, in terms of the speech, these two dimensions are incompatible. That Eros should have its source, in the sense of its chronologically first manifestations, in the corporeal is in no way incompatible with its going beyond this or with its having its "ontological" source elsewhere, as the famed ascent passage in the *Symposium* makes clear. And in any case, Rosen himself gives us a fruitful clue to his own view of the reconciliation. "The reconciliation is possible if we identify the daimonic with the tendency of genesis to be continuously other than it is....At any specific point or instant, genesis exhibits a coherent structure, but the discontinuity of points or instants means that it is also losing that structure. Genesis altogether is not immortal because each of its parts dies. But it is not mortal because each moment of death occurs as a birth of something else."⁸ But the issue

is complicated further by the fact that Socrates, apparently, does not himself succeed in reconciling the two, but goes to the other extreme from Agathon and ignores or disdains corporeal genesis. This leads to what Rosen calls the central Platonic criticism of Socrates, his peculiarly unerotic character, in the sense of his lack of concern for genesis (he never wrote anything) and for human corporeality. This issue is the core of Rosen's fascinating interpretation of Alcibiades' speech.

Now, whatever we finally decide about this interpretation – and the massive evidence Rosen adduces makes it a powerful hypothesis indeed – it may shed some light on Rosen's rather cryptic remark early in the book that "Despite its unhistorical character, the *Symposium* is evidence against the charge of nihilism that has been leveled against Plato by thinkers like Nietzsche and Heidegger."⁹ If I understand Rosen correctly, it may be that Socrates points toward nihilism but not Plato, in that Socrates rejected that "care for genesis" which is necessary to avoid the *failure of desire* which Rosen elsewhere characterizes as central to the phenomenon of nihilism.¹⁰ Plato, on the other hand, sufficiently cared for genesis to avoid such a direction, as evidenced not only by the implied critique of Socrates for which Rosen argues but also by the fact that he wrote the dialogues, whereas Socrates wrote nothing. If so, then we see here not only a thoughtful challenge to a widely accepted interpretation of the history of philosophy but an equally thoughtful characterization of the phenomenon of nihilism. The evaluation of both will place us in the midst of contemporary philosophy, and of contemporary nihilism.

Closely related to the above is Rosen's discussion of the difference between *Eros* and *philia* as the two words are used in the *Symposium*. He is surely correct in emphasizing the importance of the distinction, especially as it concerns the relation between poetry and philosophy which constitutes yet another important theme of the book. He suggests that there is a qualitative difference between the two based on the notion of possession. "Friendship (*philia*) may be defined as that form of love in which there is no erotic desire for the friend, but a shared possession of desire for some other thing."¹¹ Hence, "Friendship is higher than desire because it has attained its end."¹² One important consequence of this distinction is that *philia* has a fullness about it which tends to mitigate its component of incompleteness, a component which gets preserved, however, in the still erotic character of friendship. But as the word itself indicates, philosophy is a *friendship* for wisdom. Philosophy, then, is not a mere lack of wisdom. We might say that it is a *need* for wisdom which arises out of a kind of fullness or access to the whole, a conception of philosophy which is nowhere better expressed than by Nietzsche in the opening part of the prologue to *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Hence, the crucial importance which Rosen gives to the passage at *Symposium* 202d8-e7 in which Eros itself is characterized as "Being in the middle, and so filled up with both, it thus binds together the whole to itself." As Rosen sees, "The problem in understanding the account of Eros so far is to reconcile the terms 'between' and 'filled up with' the divine and the human, with negativity or indeterminacy of desire."¹³ All this is extremely suggestive, but I believe that Rosen himself would agree that it would be an overstatement to conclude from this that philosophy is the *possession* of wisdom. Such would be to obliterate the erotic character of philosophy, even for Socrates.¹⁴ The question for thought thus emerges: what is it that that species of Eros called philosophy possesses, and how does it stand in relation to wisdom? I shall here simply allude to my own suggestion which I set out in detail elsewhere.¹⁵ It may be that it is the possession of *reason* (which mere desire lacks) which makes possible the focusing of one's Eros on the Ideas. If Eros has reason as part of its nature, then a presentiment of the Ideas,

or wisdom, is possible even if wisdom itself is not fully attainable. Such a view would preserve the idea of the fullness out of which philosophy arises without insisting on the radical – and I believe untenable – notion of the genuine possession of wisdom.

However this may be, the distinction between friendship and desire is clearly related to the “war between philosophy and poetry” which Rosen discusses at length. If, as Rosen interprets especially Agathon’s speech, poetry is located fundamentally in the realm of genesis and so must interpret the cosmos itself as genesis, then Eros, as poetically understood, must be exclusively an Eros for genesis, or desire. If this is so, then Rosen is able to offer the following suggestive interpretation of the difference between poetry and philosophy in terms of the difference between a *desire* or *will* for wisdom and a *wish* for wisdom. “Whereas the philosophy *wishes* to see or know the whole, the poet *wills* to generate it....In philosophical terms, this (the poetic view) is closer to the assertion that *dianoia* (discursive thinking) is superior to *noesis* (noetic intuition).”¹⁶ From this standpoint, modern philosophy, which begins in and remains within the realm of genesis, is *essentially poetic*, whatever its form of presentation. And this is what Heidegger himself comes close to admitting.¹⁷ It is to Rosen’s credit that he sets out the Platonic objections to such a view with both depth and clarity. It testifies also, I believe, to the peculiar timeliness of his book which purports to be about an ancient thinker.

I wish to conclude briefly with one other aspect of the “incompleteness” of the book alluded to earlier. It is clear throughout that Rosen is extremely sympathetic to Plato’s views. As I have tried to show, he does an excellent job of revealing the Platonic view in all its complexity, as well as its disagreement with other seminal views. This is almost – but not quite – tantamount to arguing for its truth. Plato, as his choice of the dialogue form indicates, chose for a variety of complex reasons not to do so explicitly, but instead to set forth his argument in what Rosen calls the “interstices” of the complex web of the dialogue. But Rosen writes treatises, for his own reasons, and the present one leads the reader to look forward eagerly to Rosen’s own arguments for the truth of the Platonic view. Such, as he hints in the last lines of his book, will be another *logos*.

As a work of Platonic scholarship this book is thorough and competent, if somewhat intoxicated. As a confrontation with contemporary philosophy it is insightful and challenging, if somewhat talmudic. As a combination of both, it exemplifies its author’s view of philosophy as a strange combination of sobriety and madness – and an altogether pregnant one.

Notes

- 1 Stanley Rosen, *PLATO’S SYMPOSIUM*, Yale University Press, 1968, p. 248.
- 2 *IBID.*, p. 217.
- 3 *IBID.*, p. XIV.
- 4 *IBID.*, p. XXII.
- 5 *IBID.*, p. XIX.
- 6 *IBID.*, p. XXXVI.
- 7 *IBID.*, p. 263-264.
8. *IBID.*, p. 228.
9. *IBID.*, p. 4.
- 10 Stanley Rosen, “Reflections on Nihilism” in *MAN AND WORLD*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1968, p. 65 ET AL.
- 11 Stanley Rosen, *PLATO’S SYMPOSIUM*, p. 216.
- 12 *IBID.* I would quibble with his use of “desire” both here and in its second use in the above quote. “Desire” is the correct translation of *EPITHUMIA*, not of Eros, and it is the latter to which I believe Rosen is referring.
- 13 *IBID.*, p. 228.
- 14 As he intimates at pp. 216, 217, *OP. CIT.*
- 15 Drew Hyland, “Eros, Epithumia, and Philia in Plato” in *PHRONESIS*, Vol. XIII, No. 1, 1968.
- 16 Stanley Rosen, *PLATO’S SYMPOSIUM*, p. 171. My italics.
- 17 Martin Heidegger, *THE ORIGIN OF A WORK OF ART IN PHILOSOPHIES OF ART AND BEAUTY*, edited by Hofstadter and Kuhns, Modern Library Giant, 1964, especially pp. 695ff.

Drew A. Hyland

Why are We in Detroit and New York?

Them. By Joyce Carol Oates. Vanguard Press. 1969. 508 pp. \$6.95.

Mr. Sammler's Planet. By Saul Bellow. The Viking Press, 1970. 313 pp. \$7.95.

There is a French psychoanalyst named Jacques Lacan who recently decided that Freud's most important book was *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. His reasons for such a strange choice have to do with the current rage among French intellectuals, "structuralism", and Lacan's discovery of a so-called "language of the unconscious". Reading these two novels might convince one that Lacan's choice of that book was right for different reasons; that Freud's elevation of every detail of our lives, his demonstration that everything is important, that act is symbol, is a highly significant *literary* decision. In a way, on the basis of that book, one could call Freud one of our most accomplished "novelists", since we have often tended to regard the novel as a way of rendering important, of giving "meaning" to, of revealing, that common breeding ground of experience we all slush around in – the *Lebenswelt*, the lived world, the world we take for granted. Through concatenation of symbol, plot, character and all the other devices, our "world" is thematized as an issue in the novel. Experience is re-worked, jumbled around, "built" with language and revealed in a way different from our participation in that experience. But with Freud, our world *itself* stood as symbol, needing no transformation. Suddenly, nothing was unimportant, from the most tragic of our situations, to the most banal of our toilet habits; from our love of wisdom, to our love of phalluses and vaginas. Freud's world in *The Psychopathology* is, in a literal sense, a literary world; exploded, turned inside out, thematized, explicit. So overpowering was this new vision that many critics hastened to attempt to prove that great literature had really said the same thing all along, from Oedipus to Shakespeare to Joyce. And, although probably independent of Freud, the novel itself developed a near schizoid nature. On one side stood Dickens, Eliot, Tolstoi, Proust and the most exquisite architect of them all, Henry James. On the other, Kafka, Joyce, Faulkner, Mailer, Sartre and their epitome – Dostoevsky. The engine of literary history seems to have thrust us into that latter world, as, either comically or grotesquely, we live the lives of madmen in our novels, and following Freud's demand that no detail of our lives should be left unnoticed, we have tried to incorporate them *all* into the "modern novel".

As Bellow himself puts it, writing a novel now, one is faced with two subjects; the madman and the saint. And where, in even the most sublime imaginations, are there any saints left who are not madmen? The "eruption of detail" seems to have known no limits in its reduction of heroic men to figures sitting in johns. Some attempts at whatever it was that went on in James are around today; Nabokov gives it a whirl every now and then. But by and large, the "world" of our modern novel is a world Blake would have called "Ulro", grotesquely "particular" in its agony. It is almost as if, having realized that Freud's world needed no novelists, an attempt was made to out-Freud the master, and sheer, brute "description" became *the* value. In a way, as always, Mailer is still fifteen years ahead of his time, as he seems to have realized what the novel will become at the end of such a cycle – journalism.

Indeed, perversity not only fascinates us, it amuses us. Witness *Portnoy's Complaint* and *Myra Breckenridge*. This is all not to say, of course, that the world is full of dirty books. But it is full of mad books; mad like Borges or Barthelme, mad like Barth or Mailer or Oates and on and on. It is also to suggest that it may not be unwise to question whether there is anything so intrinsically valuable about madness and pain to warrant the fascination of so many of us. Perhaps perversity, agony, worthlessness and evil, as subjects for the novel, are merely the historical products of a sudden shift of attention; as men ceased to look at the stars and began to gaze at their genitals. Perhaps the era will pass and this incredible

fascination with our bestiality will subside.

Let us, though, be cautious. If not careful, any moment now, we'll use the word "absurdity" and weep for a return to beauty and grace. No; no plea like that need be made. Freud's achievements were, after all, no mean feat, and we harbor no secret historical diagrams which neatly explain the contemporary worship of nightmare. For the moment, let it suffice to note the tone of modernity as a preface to this review, whimper quietly for the absence of holy men, secretly read Proust and James, and move on to the latest novels of Joyce Carol Oates and Saul Bellow.

Miss Oates, of course, serves as a nearly perfect example of this curiosity (to use Heidegger's pejorative term) for the world of the everyday. With unbelievable energy, she has been turning out story after story in the *Yale Review*, the *Southern Review*, the *Tri-Quarterly Review*, the *Trans-Atlantic Review*, *Esquire*, the *Atlantic* and, at least a novel a year for the past three years. Her earlier, more clumsy attempts are almost humorous in the proliferation of mad, gratuitous violence popping up out of context. In one story, the boring routine of a suburban housewife was dreamily catalogued for a few pages until we get the sense that she just can't stand the monotony any more. She can't. Out of nowhere, on the last page, she beat her small son to death with a wooden spoon. In another, more recent story, after a rapid succession of her sister going insane, her father being murdered, and while her mother dies, a girl makes love to her father's murderer on the living room couch while her mother screams for help. Much of her shorter fiction is better, though. Her ability to create "females" is absolutely superb, with no qualification. (And when was the last time real women graced the pages of our novels? Probably not since Virginia Woolf?) But even her best attempts at women characters are tinged with a residue of lunacy, ready to split apart at any minute.

Even the title, *Them*, of the book which won her the National Book Award, indicates that such fissures in the self are at issue. "I" and "them" refer not so much to how people see others, but how they see themselves in a world more horrible than any poet's vision of hell — Detroit. Miss Oates lets us know quickly that these people have lost touch with themselves, that they very often find themselves gazing at their bodies doing something terrible right in front of them. There are three "characters" in *Them*, Loretta, and two of her children, Jules and Maureen. At crucial points in the novel, each of them is caught staring at a mirror in which some strange figure stares back. They are three "poor whites" in Detroit. They drink beer, watch daytime T.V., beat their children, say "nigger" or "the colored", wear tight slacks and hair curlers to the laundromat, laugh too loudly, "drop out" of school, and do hundreds of other things Miss Oates' readers might easily associate with "poor whites". But these people are not caricatures. They are frighteningly real, and Miss Oates has effectively described the explosions which have left the insides of each of them hollow.

The novel begins in the Depression in Detroit, August, 1937, with Loretta the central figure. Shortly after the story opens, the first such explosion occurs. Loretta, who has picked up some boy much younger than she, awakens to the sound of a gun being fired five inches from her head. The boy's blood is everywhere; Loretta's brother, for no apparent reason, has shot him in the head. Loretta runs out of the house, nearly naked, wanders around for a while, finds a policeman, Howard. Howard takes her back to the apartment, surveys the situation, unbuttons his pants, takes Loretta on the kitchen table, disposes of the body for her; they get married, (Yes, married. Loretta is grateful) and the novel is off and running. It ends some five hundred pages later with Jules, Loretta's son, the central character, shortly after Jules has shot a policeman (appropriately enough; this novel is well-constructed) in the face with a shotgun during the 1967 Detroit riots. In between the story of Loretta and Jules is Maureen, catatonic for most of the book after having been nearly beaten to death by her

stepfather, after he had discovered her "on the streets" (She was fourteen at the time). Scattered throughout the book as well is an idyllic love story between Jules and a young, wealthy girl, which ends with the girl abandoning Jules in a small Texas town after Jules has become horribly ill. There is another brutal murder, Howard's death, dismaying pictures of age as the grandmother slowly rots away for about a hundred pages, and so on and so forth. Had enough? Convinced that this is a "violent" book? I would caution that this sketchy outline should not allow one to scoff at the artistry of the book. The violence is not as incongruous or as absurd as it might seem from a list of the violent episodes. She *does* pull it off; it "works", as they say. Probably as well as I think Faulkner's violence in *Sanctuary* works. (A book with remarkable parallels to this one, especially if one compares Popeye with Jules.)

So, Miss Oates is concerned with many "issues" in this book, not the least of which is the attempt to stay whole as the world of Detroit hacks away at your soul. Schizophrenia is this book; Dr. Laing's "Divided Self" is a way of life for these people. The "image" of a black revolution haunts the book as well, for here it is an image; white and black as sides of the soul which strain to break apart until finally the repressed darkness erupts violently. Cities, in other words, can be schizophrenic too. Just as men, when finally confronted by an unspeakable power they have fled from and avoided, often break if the confrontation is too brutal, so do cities explode when their enslaved force begins to erupt. Psychology and politics are probably the overwhelmingly significant concerns of this novel, just as they are probably the most important issues men see around them today. Miss Oates has indeed written a "modern novel". But there is another problem raised in the book, and the issue is finally the most interesting presented. Miss Oates herself "enters" the novel explicitly at one point. Maureen, coming out of her catatonic stupor, has taken an adult night course in English Composition from a woman named Joyce Carol Oates. After failing the course, she writes two letters to Miss Oates which are published in the novel and we are presented with a partial aesthetic as the issue of "what literature does" gets raised. Maureen writes, "Why did you think that book about Madame Bovary was so important? All those books? Why did you tell us they were more important than life? They are not more important than my life." Miss Oates had taught the class that "literature gives form to life", and Maureen hates her for it. "Hate for you with your books and words and your knowing so much that never happened, in a perfect form... I lived my life but there is no form to it. No shape." And finally, "We are the ones who leaf through magazines with colored pictures and spend long, heavy hours sunk in our bodies, thinking, remembering, dreaming, waiting for something to come to us and give us a shape to so much pain."

An imminent reply is waiting for Maureen; she is a *character* in a well-formed novel; Miss Oates is replying that distinctions of intelligibility and insight are in direct proportion to how formal we make our speech, how hard we try to be intelligible. Carry that attempt to speak far enough and you get literature. Maureen's life has an amazingly complex shape to it, but, sadly enough, she can't notice it, although Miss Oates can. In the beginning of *Them*, in an author's preface, we were told that this book was to be "a work of history in fictional form." (Mailer pops up again.) And let us emphasize fictional *form*. As with Freud and Lacan's structuralists, even the most perverse, or disastrous, or horrible of experiences are at least capable of thematization, given the proper form or structure. This novel, in other words, is filled with images, symbols, with a technique which can at once render the horrors of existence as horrible as they are, and also "reveal" them in the *form* it gives them. As Freud often said, explaining why we are sad never eliminates sorrow, but at least it explains.

Miss Oates, then, has written a novel of experience, and not an "analytic" novel in the way Proust or James would write a novel about experience. The attempt is not to analyze by going "above" the experience, by transcending what occurs in an analysis based on values

beyond those of existence, but by going "beneath" it, by remaining bound to the experience and revealing the structures of that experience. And transcendence and revelation are very different. Existence becomes, in the latter, *the* standard, the value; we must always remain committed to a "formal realism". The stars offer no hope to man; but we might just get by if the novel can help us push our stone up the hill.

But those "stars" are precisely at issue for Mr. Sammler in Saul Bellow's latest novel, *Mr. Sammler's Planet*. In every way he could, Bellow has let us know that the "direction" of this novel is "up" and not "down". From little details, (Sammler does not like to ride the subway) to the source of the book's title. (There is a Dr. Lal in the book with a plan to send us all to the moon, to leave the earth). Perhaps the most striking image of Sammler's (and Bellow's) desire to leave the world of blood and demons Miss Oates is so busy "forming" is a memory of Sammler's. As a Jew in Poland during the Nazi occupation, he was to be executed. He and others, including his wife, dug a huge pit in the ground, stripped naked, and stood in front of it, Machine guns opened up on them, but, miraculously, Sammler was not hit, although earlier he had been blinded in one eye. So, he was caught at the bottom of a pile of naked corpses and a few feet of dirt. Mirroring his attempt to live with some honor and dignity in New York, Sammler crawled through the bodies and the dirt and survived. (It requires no great extension of this metaphor to realize that Miss Oates regards this symbolic feat impossible. The "situation" has, for her, simply become too overpowering.) He survived to end up in New York, buried again in the same filth, again having to fight for air. As if we hadn't gotten the point from all this, there is another instance related about the war, with a man drowning in an open latrine. New Yorkers will understand the metaphor.

But there is a beautiful tension in Sammler. He really doesn't want to be a hermit, an aesthete, and yet he really does. Sammler's values are not based on his own existence; he is not concerned so much with being authentic, being honest, being himself, being "open" as much as he's concerned with a certain nobility, with pride, dignity and "doing the right thing". He is, in fact, as close as Bellow would allow himself to go in portraying a Jewish saint. But there is no arrogance in Sammler's disdain for psychoanalysis, or modern politics, or modern morals. Sammler is also a loving man. He loves his daughter, Shula, he loves his niece whom he lives with, he loves Dr. Gruner who has kept him comfortable for years. Sammler is kind, infinitely considerate. But also tragic. The world he lives in wants no part of his goodness. Take a few examples.

Sammler was invited to speak at a Columbia University class. A converted Anglophile, Sammler had a great deal of personal contact with the British intellectuals of the thirties and a friend has persuaded him to lecture to a class studying that period. But he cannot finish his lecture. Accused of being "an old fart", told by hecklers that what he has to say is "shit", Sammler leaves hurriedly, wondering what has happened to make excrement a standard of judgment.

Sammler even tries occasionally to be a "good citizen". Having observed a pickpocket at work on a city bus, he tries to inform the police, who ignore him. Human, and in his own way, unable to avoid being fascinated by degeneracy, Sammler keeps watching the pickpocket for days until finally he is cornered by the man. And, in one of the most remarkable scenes of the book, Sammler is "warned". The pickpocket, a large, exquisitely adorned black, backs Sammler into a wall and "reveals himself" to Sammler who, terrified, stares dumbly at the man's penis. No words are spoken and none need be. The pickpocket has demonstrated his enormous "power" as adequately as our world demands. No other "weapon" is necessary, no threats needed. We understand why such a demonstration is enough.

The book itself, though, questions Sammler's ability to "go beyond" a world which does such things to him. It wonders whether such a leap is possible. "All metaphysicians please

note. Here is how it is. You will never see more clearly. And what do you make of it? This phone booth has a metal floor; smooth-hinged the folding green doors, but the floor is smarting with dry urine, the plastic telephone instrument is smashed, and a stump is hanging at the end of the cord." Sammler himself occasionally shares such thoughts, although his pessimism never reaches despair. He disagrees with the modern emphasis on *act* and its superiority to word; he wonders constantly about the limitless value placed on egalitarianism. "We have fallen into much ugliness," he complains, and when Dr. Lal asks, "What is one supposed to do?" he responds, "Perhaps the best is to have some order within oneself. Better than what many call love. Perhaps it is love." But Sammler must explain further what he means.

"I was saying that this liberation into individuality has not been a great success. For a historian of great interest, but for one aware of the suffering it is appalling. Hearts that get no real wage, souls that find no nourishment. Falsehoods, unlimited. Desire, unlimited. Possibility, unlimited. Impossible demands upon complex realities, unlimited."

And later, "The idea of the uniqueness of the soul. An excellent idea. A true idea, but in these forms? In these poor forms? Dear God! With hair, with clothes, with drugs and cosmetics, with genitalia, with round trips through evil, monstrosity, and orgy, with even God approached through obscenities? How terrified the soul must be in this vehemence, how little that is really dear to it can see in these Sadic exercises...the idea is no longer blasphemy, but rather hygiene, pleasure which is hygiene too, and a charmed and *interesting* life. An *interesting* life is the supreme concept of dullards."

Sammler is uncomfortable with demands for individuality, creativity, originality, and novelty. He knows that, in the end, these, in themselves, give no real *worth* to being human, and as values with no value, they lead to the madness and despair he finds around him in New York. Again as he puts it,

"The Self may think it wears a gay new ornament, delightfully painted, but from outside, we see that it is a millstone. Or again, this personality of which the owner is so proud is from the Woolworth store, cheap tin or plastic from the five-and-dime of souls. Seeing it that way, a man may feel that being human is hardly worth the trouble. Where is the desirable self that one might be? *Dov'e sia*, as the question is sung in the opera? That depends, it depends in part on the will of the questioner to see merit. It depends on his talent and his disinterestedness. It is right that we should dislike contrived individuality, bad pastiche, banality, and the rest. It is repulsive."

And the most significant statement of the book, "But individualism is of no interest whatever if it does not extend truth." And further, "As long as there is no ethical life and everything is poured so barbarously and recklessly into personal gesture this must be endured."

Sammler knows that being "free" is not so important as being right. He has seen the consequences of such freedom and has had to struggle all his life to stay above them, just as he had to struggle out of that pit.

Literature for Mr. Sammler wants more out of life than its form, it wants its goodness, its value. And Mr. Sammler cannot find that value in the world he experiences, cannot even find it in the people he loves. Sammler's planet does not help Sammler find the dignity in his life, although his love for his friends will not allow him to escape that life. Sammler loves, but does not merely love men, he loves his gods in another world.

These two books, both about nightmares come alive in two American cities, both even roughly dealing with the same thirty year period, stand in remarkable dialogue with each other; but a dialogue, given the superiority of Bellow's intellect and talent, that is really no contest. And, just to add a comment all too irrelevant in modern discussions of literature, Bellow may just be right.

Robert B. Pippin



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